

Kierkegaard After MacIntyre

Essays on Freedom, Narrative,
and Virtue

EDITED BY
John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd

With Replies by
Alasdair MacIntyre and Philip L. Quinn



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Acknowledgments

The idea for this book came from conversations we began at a conference on Kierkegaard held at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, in July 1997. We agreed that Alasdair MacIntyre's critique of Kierkegaard in *After Virtue* represented an important opportunity to clarify Kierkegaard's views about ethical rationality by way of response. But we also agreed that there were important similarities as well as remaining differences between Kierkegaard's work and MacIntyre's project—and more broadly between "existentialism" and the neo-Aristotelian "virtue ethics" which is currently flourishing within analytical philosophy. And this suggested to us the possibility of a mutually enlightening dialogue between these traditions. We also thought it would be useful to scholars working from either a background in Kierkegaard studies or contemporary ethical theory to have a volume that collected representative Kierkegaardian replies to MacIntyre's original critique of Kierkegaard, along with new essays developing and broadening their original ideas, and replies from opposing perspectives.

We are grateful to all the contributors to this volume—both to those whose work had been previously published for allowing us to reprint their papers here and to those who accepted our requests to write new pieces for this volume. It has been especially pleasing to find our sense of the value of this project shared by other Kierkegaard scholars. We thank the Søren Kierkegaard Society of the United States for featuring early drafts of two new papers for this book in their session at the Eastern Division conference of the American Philosophical Association in Boston (December 27, 1999). The participants in that session, including Professor MacIntyre, helped encourage the work brought to fruition here. Phil Quinn was kind enough to amend his lively response at the Boston session for inclusion in the present volume, and this has enriched our project. And we are also very

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Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics: Kierkegaard and MacIntyre

JOHN J. DAVENPORT

Summary

This paper argues that Kierkegaard's interpretation of the relation between freedom, dispositional character, and earnestness provides the basis for an existential version of virtue ethics that both benefits from and solves remaining problems within MacIntyre's social account of the virtues. In place of the classical notion of eudaimonia as the human telos, existential virtue ethics puts authenticity, understood as practical coherence among earnestly willed projects that can give narrative shape and enduring meaning to a human life. While authenticity in this sense requires ethical consciousness as an ultimate basis for our cares and ground projects, and thus also requires certain proto-virtues, it does not require moral goodness, nor does it provide a complete foundation for ethics. Unlike its eudaimonist predecessor, this minimal teleology of human selfhood is thus compatible with the full range of human freedom, including the possibility of radical evil.

I. Preliminary Reflections: Common Ground in the Twentieth Century

Historical Introduction

French and German existentialism became popular among Anglo-American writers and intellectuals during the middle of the twentieth century, at the same time as what is now commonly called "virtue ethics" (or sometimes more specifically "Neo-Aristotelian" ethics) began its revival in Anglo-American philosophy. While college students in the 1960s were

taught books like Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* and *Concept of Anxiety*, Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, and Robert Solomon's *The Passions*, quite independently writers such as Philippa Foot, Elizabeth Anscombe, G. H. von Wright, and Stanley Hauerwas were returning to the idea that virtues of character are the central concept in ethics, which cannot be adequately understood simply as dispositions to adhere to moral precepts derived from deontic standards of justice or from some conception of the natural law. While interest in existentialism has waned in continental philosophy, giving way to versions of postmodernism that tend to reject the notion of persons as subjects of consciousness responsible for their individual destiny, interest in virtue ethics has deepened as dissatisfaction with formalist or Kantian approaches to duty and justice has increased. It is not surprising in this context that MacIntyre, as the first writer in the virtue ethics revival to address the new genre of existentialism, should have construed Kierkegaard as one more neo-Kantian, and interpreted his notion of a radical choice between "aesthetic" and "ethical" modes of existence as an attempt to supply what the rationalist tradition had failed to provide for ethics: namely, some basis other than divine command or a built-in motivational orientation towards a natural *telos* of the human species.¹

Ever since existentialism and virtue ethics first encountered each other in *After Virtue*, it has been taken for granted that these two genres are fundamentally opposed in their interpretations of human personhood and morality. The most simplistic gloss is that virtue ethics views moral character as a matter of habit or disposition, without any concern for freedom, while existentialism puts all the emphasis on a freedom so absolute that stable character becomes inconceivable—a freedom so arbitrary that it must select its guiding values themselves for no reason in an absurd and groundless choice.² Moreover, while virtue ethics seems to subordinate all interior individuality or self-relation to social relations that ultimately determine our self-interpretations, existentialism allegedly abstracts the individual from all the interpersonal connections that could give his or her life any meaning. While virtue ethics regards each person's life as simply one part of a social whole, existentialism supposedly makes them into a self-generating intrapersonal consciousness, an atom in a social void whose externalities and group memberships are a matter of self-interested contract at best, or self-deception at worst.³ What two dogmas could then be farther apart, or define more opposite extremes in the spectrum of philosophical anthropology and ethics? The idea of an 'existential virtue ethics' must then be an oxymoron.

Certainly the combination I hope to explore will remain unintelligible if we insist on these caricatures of virtue ethics and existentialism in their most facile form. To be fair, this reductive gloss is not so close to the richly

detailed story Alasdair MacIntyre told in *After Virtue*. Yet the widespread acceptance of this caricature (or something like it) may still be attributable in part to MacIntyre's dramatic contrast between Nietzsche/Sartre and Aristotle/Aquinas. Although MacIntyre's full account was more subtle, one of the polemical effects of *After Virtue* was to fix an image of existentialism that associates it profoundly with the Hobbesian individualism that Nietzsche admired and in many ways extended. However this may be, the recent history of existentialism and virtue ethics reveals shared concerns that should immediately give us *prima facie* reasons to doubt any story that places these genres in absolute opposition. At least in the twentieth century, existentialism and virtue ethics played parallel parts in a shared story that has both a theoretical and a social dimension.

By mid-century existentialism had become a social phenomenon in American and European high culture: from the seminars of philosophers in the phenomenological school, it spread to politics, literature, psychology, and other fields. Today virtue ethics is approaching a similar prominence, and its influence is clearly visible in some genres of contemporary sociology, psychology, and political theory. In both cases, the popularity of the philosophical paradigm was partly a result of the convergence of several factors in modern industrial society. Existentialism became a 'movement' because of the widely felt need in the West to privilege individual freedom in response to totalitarian political ideologies. It also responded to the subtler threats posed by behaviorism in psychology, technocratic theories of management and organization, and alienation produced by a mass consumer culture molded by distant, inaccessible, and bureaucratic corporations and state institutions. For example, existentialist themes were blended with the early Marx in Frankfurt-school critical theory because they seemed to promise emancipation from the dominance of instrumental reason, or from life as a mass man, an anonymous unit in a profit-maximizing machine. Its ideal of authenticity, or being true to one's own original potential,⁴ seemed to offer an inspiring alternative to the reduction of all value either to utilitarian sums or to charismatic/persuasive expressions of private brute preferences. And it is significant that the return at mid-century of analytic ethical theory to virtues of character was propelled largely by the same set of interconnected social and theoretical concerns.

This was the intellectual environment in which MacIntyre began work on *After Virtue*, and without its influence the questions he asked in particular about the value of Sartrean ideas could not have been posed and would not have seemed so relevant to readers in the 1980s. Indeed, such has been the power of his critique that to new readers of *After Virtue* today, it may seem odd that he should have been so concerned about existentialism. But just as existentialism was born in the late nineteenth century out

of romantic dissatisfaction with Hegelian rationalism, contemporary virtue ethics was born of twentieth-century doubts about analytic rationalism and relativism in ethics. The main rationalist and noncognitivist alternatives in ethical theory no longer appeared viable as bases for social criticism and political reform. Following the linguistic turn, positivism had reduced the main discussion in ethics to a metatheoretical debate about the semantics of moral language, in which the chief question was whether or not ethical propositions could even have a cognitive meaning aside from their alleged noncognitive function of charismatic influence on blind emotions and brute preferences. But outside this tedious and fruitless level of argument, the main alternatives in normative ethics had become existentially suspect as a basis for life, even if (as Rawls surely showed) they were not theoretically bankrupt. Kant's ethics of rational duty had not saved Europe's ordinary citizens from the mass corruption of culture that led to the Holocaust. Likewise, although consequentialist ethical theories began from beneficent motives, by the middle of the twentieth century, utilitarianism had become little more than a convenient rationalization for the unlimited free-market capitalist ideology of neo-classical economic theory.⁵

The twentieth-century revival of virtue ethics cannot be adequately understood without reference to this historical situation. Like Kierkegaard and Sartre, MacIntyre responded (and still responds) to the human circumstances of his time. In *After Virtue*, he unmasked the cast of characters dominating post-war industrial Western democracies: "the aesthetic, the therapist and the manager, the bureaucratic expert" (AV 73). The perceived emptiness of these characters' lives is similar to the hollowness Kierkegaard finds in the nominally Christian bourgeoisie of Renaissance Copenhagen and Berlin, or that Sartre finds in the ritualized numbness of Parisian social roles. While the existentialists thought the cure lay in personal authenticity, MacIntyre responds with a neo-Aristotelian ethics. Despite the apparent irreconcilability of these philosophical therapies, twentieth-century existentialism and virtue ethics understood themselves as practical responses to similar diseases of the soul and society, and as theoretical responses to similar conceptual aporias.⁶

Even at the political level, existentialists and virtue ethicists shared more common ground in the twentieth century than is commonly imagined. MacIntyre wrote that "the politics of modern societies oscillate between a freedom which is nothing but a lack of regulation of individual behavior and forms of collectivist control designed only to limit the anarchy of self-interest," and he praises Solzhenitsyn for rejecting both as intolerable (AV 35). Existentialists likewise opposed both these tendencies. Although libertarians like Ayn Rand sometimes vainly hoped to make an ally of Sartrean existentialism, the existentialists' common focus on the

facticity of human life—its situated temporality—made clear from the beginning that the independence to be valued as part of mature selfhood was something quite different from mere Lockean freedom from interference in doing whatever we want with our property. This is not to deny that twentieth-century writers in the genres of existentialism and virtue ethics have had different and conflicting interpretations of the importance of liberties in contemporary society, but they have both rejected the libertarian ideology of prepolitical natural rights and its illusion of atonic, unencumbered, or non-situated selves.⁷

The Structure of the Analysis

These preliminary reflections are sufficient, I think, to cast doubt on the prevailing myth that existentialism and virtue ethics are wholly opposed or incommensurable paradigms, and thus to motivate a more substantive comparison of them. But this alone is not enough to establish the possibility of an existential virtue ethics, or to clarify what this would involve. To move towards this goal, we need to concentrate on one particular sort of existentialism, and then on one version of virtue ethics, which show promising connections. Such connections emerge if we consider the relation between the thought of Søren Kierkegaard and the tradition of virtue ethics, focusing in particular on MacIntyre's continuing effort to devise a new basis for a Thomistic version of virtue ethics.

There are several ways one might develop this comparison, but I will focus on Kierkegaard's unique contributions to the psychology of moral virtue, and why his insights should lead us to modify the traditional Aristotelian model in the direction of an existential conception of the role virtues play in a meaningful life. In section II, after arguing generally (in sympathy with Mehl, Turner, Rudd, and others) that Kierkegaardian ethics and moral psychology shares much more than virtue ethicists have recognized with their tradition(s), I introduce two initial distinctions between Kierkegaard's approach and Aquinas's. The development of these differences reveals what is distinctive about an existential virtue ethics.

In section III, I will outline Kierkegaard's general conception of virtue in relation to his understanding of freedom. Although this analysis reveals some immediate similarities to MacIntyre's narrative conception of human agency, it also locates one important difference between MacIntyre's and Kierkegaard's conception of persons. Nevertheless, MacIntyre finds himself closer to Kierkegaard than to rival theories of virtue ethics on a number of questions regarding virtues, and I will argue that this convergence becomes even more apparent in MacIntyre's *Carus Lectures*, where he moves closer to Kierkegaard's conception of agape as the chief substantive virtue.

After canvassing these connections between Kierkegaardian and MacIntyrean virtue ethics, section IV argues that Kierkegaard and MacIntyre have each focused on only part of the task of defending a complete virtue ethics, and that the parts they have developed stand in a largely complementary relation. Kierkegaard and MacIntyre each need key insights provided by the other thinker to resolve certain pressing problems with their accounts as they stand. Some of the apparently deep differences between them thus result from each thinker's 'one-sidedness,' and can take their place on different sides of the synthesis characteristic of an existential virtue ethics. Nevertheless, I will argue that this combination requires replacing the eudaimonist conception of the human *telos* with a more promising existential conception of a meaningful life.

Finally, section V focuses on the remaining differences between MacIntyre and Kierkegaard invoked in this division between eudaimonist and existential teleology. These differences result from the existentialist's rejection of the Platonic/Aristotelian theory that all human motivation ultimately traces to the apprehension of ends as "good" in some way for the agent. The possibility of a positive will to evil becomes intelligible once we recognize that the human will is not simply rational control of appetites and desires that aims at a *unstyrd eudaimonia*. On the alternative existentialist model, the *kinds* of teleology and freedom essential to human personhood are different than those implied by eudaimonist moral psychologies, but they are not empty or arbitrary. Thus the existentialist model derivable from Kierkegaard remains compatible with a conception of *phronesis* as moral sensitivity and virtues as dispositions of free willing. This shows why virtue ethics does not depend essentially on a neo-Aristotelian moral psychology of the sort MacIntyre has defended. A fruitful exchange between MacIntyrean and Kierkegaardian ideas leads to a better way of framing and conceiving virtue ethics in distinctively existential terms.

II. Kierkegaard: A Kind of Virtue Ethicist

Kierkegaard's treatment of "the ethical" as a category of lived human experience—and his understanding of its content and metaphysical status—is in deep accord with some central features of the tradition(s) of virtue ethics stemming from Aristotle and Augustine, and in discord with at least some alternatives within those tradition(s). Kierkegaard is *a kind* of virtue ethicist, and although he is not exactly the same kind as MacIntyre,⁸ they are closer to each other than to rival views on some controversial questions in contemporary virtue ethics. I begin by outlining five general areas of broad agreement between MacIntyre and Kierkegaard.

Then I explain my approach to Kierkegaard's concept of "the ethical" as a prereligious stage of selfhood.

First, like Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates (who so profoundly influenced his thought, as well as his conception of his role in Danish society), Kierkegaard also takes motivational character and the direction of one's whole life, rather than particular types of action, to be the primary *skelyct* of ethics.⁹ For him, ethics concerns the entire range of traditional virtues and duties, but Kierkegaard focuses in particular on what I will call 'proto-virtues,' which function as the *conditio sine qua non* for the attainment of the more substantive moral virtues. For example Kierkegaard writes (in his own name) that "cowardliness keeps a person from acknowledging what is the good, the truly great and noble, which ought to be the goal of his striving and his diligence early and late."¹⁰ Kierkegaard interprets courage in a way that gives it a central role in attaining moral maturity, for it is the courage to make resolutions—to make a beginning in striving for any challenging goal the pursuit of which demands commitment over some extended course of time, in the face of likely adversity—that first brings specifically *aretic* ethical contrasts of 'noble' versus 'base' into sharp focus for us.¹¹ The salience of these contrasts is crucial for the cares and commitments that determine a significant part of our character.

Second, to be in the ethical life-stage or existential "sphere" for Kierkegaard is to be *disposad* to interpret one's actions, motives, and interests in terms of an ethical language of "strong contrasts," in Charles Taylor's sense.¹² The ethically existing agent for Kierkegaard has not necessarily become virtuous, but is at least prone to see wrong actions in terms of concepts like "untruthful, unchaste, [or] unjust."¹³ For Kierkegaard, as for Taylor, this sort of "strong evaluation" must also be "anchored in feelings, emotions, aspirations," and so involve a kind of "affective awareness" of our act or motive as worthy or base in some particular way.¹⁴ In other words, to be an ethically existing agent is already to have a certain kind of *character* that makes rich ethical contrasts salient for the agent—even if this character may not yet be virtuous. As James Collins says, Kierkegaard thought of existential stages as basic forms of life defined by "the most fundamental commitments and organizing ideals available to men."¹⁵ The fundamental commitment of the ethical agent is to interpret his or her actions, cares, and overall life-direction under the discipline not simply of some ethical criterion or other, but under what ethicists today call *agent-centered restrictions*.¹⁶ For only restrictions of this kind make possible the sorts of cares and commitments around which an agent can form a life that will have narrative unity and continuity for him.

Third, this tendency to evaluate options for choice in terms of strong evaluations also means that the ethical attitude for Kierkegaard is wholly opposed to *consequentialism* in Anscombe's sense, i.e., evaluation solely

and simply in terms of the likely aggregate external effects of various possible actions, motives, character-traits, policies, and so on. In fact, since other kinds of strong evaluation are involved even in the higher forms of aesthetic existence for Kierkegaard, even aesthetic heroism is incompatible with utilitarianism in his analysis.¹⁷ What distinguishes *ethical* agent-restrictions and the strong contrasts they involve from aesthetic strong evaluation is in part the universality and necessity of the former for all moral agents. It is important to note, however, that ethical values can be "categorical" in this agent-focused sense, as obligating all responsible persons, without being impersonal in *content*, or (in Jorge Garcia's words) "being independent of anyone's interests, needs, flourishing, or happiness."¹⁸ For Kierkegaard, what virtue requires of us will vary according to our particular historical circumstance, role-relationships, and inner resources. In "Against Cowardliness," he writes,

But the good, the truly great and noble, is, of course, not just something general and as such the general object of knowledge; it is also something particular in relation to the individual's particular talent, so that one person is capable of more than another, so that one person is capable of it in one way, another in another. The talent itself is not the good, as if exceptional capability were the good and limited capability the bad (what a bane for the fortunate, what despair for the unfortunate!)—no, talent is the indifferent that nevertheless has importance. (EUD 358)

But although his ethics is aretaic and perfectionist,¹⁹ Kierkegaard does often present it in terms that allude to deontic concepts of duty, obligation, and obedience. Need this place his conception outside the scope of "virtue ethics" properly understood? Under the influence of Elizabeth Anscombe's 1958 paper,²⁰ some authors in the twentieth-century revival of virtue ethics have argued that the notion of obligation or moral necessity is either dispensable or even deceptive. Thus an introduction to one new reader says that for virtue ethicists, "arctaic notions like virtue, admirability, and excellence are more basic than—or even replace—deontic notions like moral obligation and rightness."²¹ Similarly, Garcia writes that in serious or "radical" virtue ethics, "what is morally required" is conceptually less basic than "what is morally virtuous."²²

If one *must* demote the concept of obligation or moral necessity to the status of a completely derivative concept to count as a virtue ethicist, then Kierkegaard would probably have to be excluded, since he constantly emphasizes the absoluteness of ethical requirements and ideals. But his pseudonym Judge William warns against understanding the ethical solely as abstract law, or a list of particular duties external to the self: instead he urges that the person who lives ethically understands duty as "the expression of

his innermost being" (EO II 254) and thus "expresses the universal" in his individual life (EO II 256). This conception of the intimate self-knowledge of the ethical agent who sees himself in light of ethical contrasts is clearly modeled on Socrates rather than Kant. And in his later religious writings, Kierkegaard's own 'categorical imperative' is to love one's neighbor, or to follow the ideal of universal agape.²³ Thus for Kierkegaard it seems that aretaic and deontic concepts are equiprimordial and interdependent. Similarly, MacIntyre has always resisted the anti-nomological extremism of some contemporary virtue ethicists. Despite being "deeply indebted" to Anscombe, MacIntyre has argued that medieval virtue ethicists in the Aristotelian tradition had a coherent understanding of moral principles simultaneously as "teleological injunctions" describing qualities necessary to realize our true nature and as "divinely ordained law" (AV 53). This connection between the aretaic and the nomological remains for MacIntyre when virtue ethics is disconnected from divine commands. He is explicit that his social account of the virtues cannot dispense with the idea that "a morality of virtues requires as its counterpart a conception of moral law" (AV 200). For MacIntyre, then, deontic and virtue concepts are two sides of the same coin, just as they are for Kierkegaard.²⁴

Fourth, Kierkegaard follows the tradition(s) of virtue ethics in affirming "the reality of certain types of character-traits"²⁵ constitutively involved in virtues, and holding that these traits begin with habits, evaluative attitudes, and sentiments whose initial shapes are formed in childhood. For example, Robert C. Roberts notes this theme in *The Book on Alms*, where Kierkegaard argues that a reverence for Christianity learned in childhood provides a surer basis than theological study for choices that reflectively affirm that reverence against incompatible inclinations.²⁶ The same general idea is found in many of his works. For this reason, Kierkegaard shares MacIntyre's view that ethics can be understood only as part of a broader inquiry into moral psychology, philosophical anthropology, and metaphysics.²⁷

Fifth, as scholars have often emphasized, Kierkegaard's shares with Augustine and Aquinas the notion that virtues are qualities of character connected to the attainment of beatitude as the final end and highest good of human life. As Alastair Hannay remarks, Climacus's notion of an "eternal happiness" in the *Pastorship* seems very close to Aquinas's conception of the human *telos* as "a special kind of contentment bestowed by God, a happiness or heavenly bliss, in the form of a maximally satisfying human participation in the divine."²⁸ But although he regards this infinite happiness as the true *telos* of human life (so failure to move towards it constitutes deficiency and pathology), the relation between virtue and this teleological conception of the self as ordered to God is not as clear for Kierkegaard as it is for Aquinas. As MacIntyre argues, Aquinas follows the basic

Aristotelian view which defines the virtues as those qualities which make possible the attainment of our true end. Among the Jewish, Islamic, and Christian Aristotelian theologians of the early medieval period, "The true end of man can no longer be completely achieved in this world," but otherwise the Aristotelian schema remains unchanged (AV 53). This implies a *metaphysical foundation* in the form of humanity for the normative authority of virtue-ideals and the associated precepts of natural law. MacIntyre emphasizes this point: for Aquinas as for Aristotle, "virtue is a secondary concept" defined by some prior concept of "the good life for man" or what it is to flourish as human (AV 184-85). And virtually all its contemporary advocates seem to assume that virtue ethics is impossible without such a foundation in roles, functions, divine design plans, or natural *telos*—i.e., that virtue-values must be grounded in facts that are not in themselves ethical but have a different and prior metaphysical status.²⁹

In this sense, contemporary virtue ethics is *eudaimonistic*. For present purposes, I define eudaimonistic theories as those which (1) propose a metaphysical foundation for virtue ethics, defining virtues as qualities of character that promote the attainment of the human *telos* and vices as qualities of character that impede its attainment, and (2) conceive the human *telos* as happiness in a holistic sense embracing all that is desirable in human life. As I understand it, Kierkegaard's virtue ethics follows neither of these patterns. For Kierkegaard, we have a *telos* in the sense of an end whose practical necessity is set for us by our nature, but it is not an Aristotelian chief good, and it does not function as a complete metaphysical foundation for ethics.³⁰

This is complicated by the fact that for Kierkegaard, our *telos* has both a provisional abstract form and a final wholly concrete form (corresponding to the two main transitions between life-views or spheres of existence): our *telos* first appears in the abstract form of *authenticity of the will*, and only later as salvation in God. Once we have moved from the wantonness of aesthetic existence into ethical earnestness, we can eventually discover that the kind of self-relation intended in the ideal of authenticity can only be attained through "an absolute relation" to the Absolute as the personal God who saves from sin. Unlike other authors in this volume, I will focus almost exclusively on the provisional form of the human *telos* as authenticity, since my present aim is to reconstruct and extend those aspects of Kierkegaard's thought that have critical relevance even for secular virtue ethics. But this approach may have an added heuristic advantage: I believe its findings will also shed some light on how we should understand Kierkegaard's notion of our *telos* in its concrete religious form. Although he refers to it as an infinite happiness, properly understood I do not believe this is simply a version of eudaimonia as the 'chief good,' as beatitude apparently is for Aquinas.

Moreover, while the authority of ethics and the attainment of authenticity are closely tied together for Kierkegaard, our teleological impetus towards authenticity does not in his view suffice to ground the authority of ethics (see sections IV and V below). This remains true at the religious stage: our *telos* understood as the happiness of salvation does not *ground* the virtues of moral life or faith for Kierkegaard, but is instead their final complement or true reward. As Alastair Hannay argues, for Kierkegaard "the notion of a transcendent God as the source and guarantor of personal value" gives an absoluteness to ethical requirements which transcends the social basis of "civically defined virtue" and implies that there is "no determinable limit to what a person might be required to do in pursuance of the good."³¹ Hannay calls this absoluteness "the autonomy of ethics:"

In Kierkegaard's context the autonomy of ethics has two sides corresponding, one might say, to an upper and lower limit. On the one hand, ethical principles and concepts are not mere expressions of a surpassable stage in spiritual development; they contain specifications of irreducible, and in that sense ultimate or absolute, *desiderata*. In this sense, to say that ethics is autonomous is to say that one *cannot* go beyond ethics, for ethics forms an upper limit. . . . But ethics is, on the other hand, also autonomous in the sense that it envelope, rather than arises out of, the conditions of human existence; neither ethical principles and concepts themselves nor the individual's understanding of them are a natural, logical, or 'dialectical' product of elements already found in a pre-ethical stage. Ethics in this respect lies beyond the self and its world, that is, beyond time. . . . In this respect one can say that although the ethical forms an unsurpassable upper limit from the moral agent's or moral describer's point of view, its own lower limit nevertheless lies beyond nature, time, and history.³²

In other words, for Kierkegaard ethics has no pre-ethical metaphysical foundation in any teleological essence, or even in Kantian implicit commitments of reason. The "autonomy of ethics" in this sense is roughly equivalent to what Emmanuel Levinas later called the *priority* of ethics to metaphysics, or the radical originality of our experience of responsibility.³³ As Hannay says, within this freestanding or absolute perspective, we can still speak of a desire for transcendent fulfillment which points towards the true *telos* of human nature, but only because this 'nature' is understood from the beginning in terms of the irreducibly ethical categories of "selfhood and individuality,"³⁴ rather than as a kind-essence or substantial form. In this respect, Kierkegaard's existential virtue ethics is a postmodern rather than a eudaimonistic ethics. Yet it remains (most clearly in its religious form) a kind of virtue ethics, rather than a merely "adverbial" ethics of attentiveness and solicitude of the sort we get from Heidegger, for example.³⁵ This is possible precisely because not all virtue ethics has a

eudaimonist form. To understand the alternative, we need to consider Kierkegaard's existential psychology.

III. Existential Virtues as Dispositions of Freedom

Earnestness/Care as the Form of Virtue

Kierkegaard understands the sort of psychological states that can constitute virtues in a particular way that sets him apart from several other virtue ethicists. His insights on this question show that Kierkegaard is important as a virtue ethicist in large part because he makes some unique contributions to the Anscombian project of clarifying the basic psychological concepts involved in notions of agency and character without which an ethics of virtue cannot be articulated.³⁶

Some authors think of virtues primarily as dispositions to *behave* in certain characteristic ways, that is, as one set of the various "personality traits" measured by psychological inventories asking us how we tend to behave in reaction to different situations and problems. A more complex view stems from Aristotle's notion that *areté* is "a state concerned with choice, lying in a mean relative to us, this being determined by reason and in the way in which the man of practical wisdom would determine it."³⁷ Virtues in this sense cannot be unthinking habits of action of the sort that could be produced by mindlessly drilling children in certain patterns of behavior. To say they are concerned with "choice" (*prohairesis*) means they involve not a tendency to some noncognitive urge or brute impulse but rather a stable disposition to act in the relevant way when appropriate because one thinks and feels in the right way about the situation. In other words, the virtuous disposition is not mechanistic in form: it is not an inarticulate pattern of behavior of the sort that might be produced by brainwashing, posthypnotic suggestion, or the creation of tropic mechanisms in the brain,³⁸ but rather the sort of "deliberative desire" that links up with decision.³⁹ Lear characterizes it as moderate desire for whatever is judged noble or best by a kind of prudence whose sensitivity to circumstances is itself dependent on already having the right sort of "character."⁴⁰ As Roberts has emphasized, this character itself partially consists in tendencies to pleasure and pain in various experiences and prospects, and to related emotions, that are linked to particular ways of interpreting one's choice-circumstances. Thus for Aristotle, "direct dispositions to right appetite and emotion, which do not require moral strength [or self-control] for their exemplification, can be virtues."⁴¹ This view is recast by writers such as von Wright, Williams, Nussbaum, McDowell, and MacIntyre, who all think virtues involve dispositions to desire certain kinds of goods as ends in

themselves, as well as to feel and think appropriately in reaction to the circumstances. They do not, however, connect virtue with *will* in any sense distinct from some combination of desire, emotion, or practical reasoning. Existential virtue ethics will differ significantly here in seeing virtues as *volitional* states of resolve that involve the exercise of libertarian freedom.⁴² How can this be?

Kierkegaard gives us some clues in his account of "earnestness" as the basic proto-virtue of the will (the lack of which underlies the proto-vices of aestheticism). In the *Concept of Anxiety*, Kierkegaard's pseudonym Haufniensis says that earnestness cannot be reduced to a conceptual definition without disconnecting it from the first-personal function that makes it earnestness, namely, the function of engaging the self wholeheartedly in some cause or purpose. He uses love as an analogy for this aspect of earnestness: "Whoever loves can hardly find joy and satisfaction, not to mention growth, in preoccupation with a definition of what love properly is" (CA 147), since to love is to be focused actively on the good of what one loves.⁴³ Just as virtue involves *phronesis* for Aristotle, earnestness is related to an understanding of truth, but it consists in *taking to heart* the relevant truth, or being "certain" of it in the practical sense of being willing to *act* on it. In earnestness,

truth is for the particular individual only as he himself produces it in action. If the truth is for the individual in any other way, or if he prevents the truth from being for him in that way, we have a phenomenon of the demonic [or avoidance of earnestness]. Truth has always had many loud proclaimers, but the question is whether a person will in the deepest sense acknowledge the truth, will allow it to permeate his whole being. . . . (CA 138)

We might compare this to Frankfurt's Augustinian point that what seemed to be a decision about our commitments, if it produces no tendency to action, may not really be a wholehearted decision⁴⁴—or in Kierkegaardian terms, it may not represent an earnest appropriation of the subjective reason for that decision. Earnestness in this respect is similar to the kind of volitional attitude that Frankfurt calls *caaring* about something, which involves being personally "invested" in it and self-consciously "guiding oneself along a distinctive course" of agency that such devotion requires.⁴⁵ Caring in this sense is a reflective attitude, as is earnestness.

Haufniensis distinguishes earnestness from "disposition," which he defines following Rosenkranz's *Psychology* as a tendency involving "the unity of feeling and self-consciousness" (CA 148). A "disposition" in this sense is distinct from a blind conatus or drive: "If the clarity of cognition is lacking, [or] knowledge of the feeling, there exists only the urge of the spirit of nature, the turgidity of immediacy" (CA 148). We should understand this to mean that a disposition is a tendency to some sort of *intelli-*

glible action, that is, to an action that is intelligible to its agent in terms of the intention that constitutes it as an action (rather than mere behavior). This will include a tendency to the desires, emotions, and judgments that underlie the formation of such an intention. A "disposition" in this sense could be understood in MacIntyre's terms as the recurrence of a significant motif in the interpersonally accessible narrative in terms of which the agent understands his or her agency.⁴⁶ The agent need not reflectively recognize the significance of such a motif for it to count as a disposition of her character, but it must be so recognizable. MacIntyre clearly thinks that virtues are kinds of disposition in this sense,⁴⁷ but Kierkegaard holds that earnest states of motivation involve something *more* than dispositions so defined. For Haufniensis writes,

Earnestness and disposition correspond to one another in such a way that earnestness is a higher as well as the deepest expression for what disposition is. Disposition is a determinant of immediacy, while earnestness, on the other hand, is the acquired originality of disposition, its originality preserved in the responsibility of freedom and its originality affirmed in the enjoyment of blessedness. In its historical development, the originality of disposition makes precisely the eternal in earnestness, for which reason earnestness can never become habit. . . . [H]abit arises as soon as the eternal disappears from repetition. When the originality in earnestness is acquired and preserved, then there is succession and repetition, but as soon as originality is lacking in repetition, there is habit. The earnest person is earnest precisely through the originality with which he returns in repetition. (CA 148-9)

It will help in interpreting the distinctions in this difficult passage to connect them with some more recent themes in moral psychology. States of earnestness and dispositions are distinguished here because dispositions to think, feel, intend, and act in certain ways can—for all their regularity and pervasiveness in one's 'personality' (as interpreted by external observers and interlocutors)—still remain just tenacious psychological recurrences that are not more deeply integrated into the person's self, or that play no essential role in what we might call the *inward narrative core* of one's agency. This deeper level involves states of the "higher-order will" in Frankfurt's sense, i.e., states of identification with certain motives or reasons for acting, which are then in Kierkegaard's sense subjectively appropriated, rather than held in speculative detachment. The difference is that Kierkegaard has a *narrative* understanding of this inward core (as opposed to Frankfurt's initial time-slice understanding of such higher-order volitions⁴⁸). In other words, for Kierkegaard, earnestness is realized in "dispositions" of the higher-order will. This is why he can say that earnestness is constituted by a *kind* of "disposition," that "earnestness is a higher as well as the deepest expression for what disposition is" (CA 149).

Earnest states of will are not *mere* dispositions in the familiar sense (i.e., patterns of attitude and intentional action), but rather dispositions of agent-commitment which are deeply integrated in (and thus partially constitutive of) the whole self. That there are dispositions at this deeper narrative level means that we can speak of an inner volitional *character*. This is not a set of character-traits the self *has* as accidental properties; rather this character *is* the self. Thus in existential virtue ethics we distinguish two levels of character: the outer and the inner. This is the distinction Alastair Hannay finds in the *Sickness Unto Death* and "the self as a particular set of psychosomatic traits and aptitudes and "the self that one can possess only by taking an 'inward direction' or position towards features of one's outer self."⁴⁹

This again suggests a comparison of earnest states with what Frankfurt calls *cares*, which are higher-order volitions sustained over time, so that the person's reflexive stand towards her own desires, emotions, and patterns of intentional action become integral parts of the lasting commitments that define her enduring self.⁵⁰ States of earnestness involve the same kind of reflexivity as caring. There is a sense in which the proper object of earnestness is always the agent himself, and without this an earnest concern for any more particular cause or purpose can become comical (CA 150). What Kierkegaard means by this is not that we must care primarily *about* ourselves, but rather that earnest caring about anything or anyone else will also involve a reflexive effort to control and organize our own character in accordance with our concern, if it is truly earnest. This reflexivity distinguishes cares from "habits" of the outward psyche in Kierkegaard's sense. For as Frankfurt also says, we cannot assume

that whenever a person's life displays over a period of time some more or less stable attitudinal or behavioral disposition, this reflects what the person cares about during that time. After all, patterns of interest or of response may be manifestations only on habits or of involuntary regularities of some other kind; and it is also possible for them to develop merely by chance.⁵¹

Cares are dispositional, but they are states of a deeper kind than "dispositions" or "habits" in the more familiar outward sense. Moreover, cares and the volitional identifications they involve are not among the initial 'raw materials' of the human psyche: rather, they are self-generated responses to our given tendencies and our situation. Kierkegaard explains his distinction in a similar fashion: "one may be born with dispositions, but no one is born with earnestness" (CA 150). This also helps to explain why, as Frankfurt says, what a person cares about is "more germane to the character of his will" on which we judge a person's worth than all the more particular "decisions or choices he makes."⁵² Kierkegaard says much the same thing:

"the essential worth of an individuality" can best be judged by ascertaining "what has made him earnest in life" (CA 150) or (in effect) what he *cares about*.

Dispositions and habits as 'personality traits' in the common sense—as tendencies to certain first-order psychic states of desire, emotion, thought, intention, and action—are not as central to the estimation of moral worth because they may not be expressions of the whole or deep self, however significant their effects on the person's life. Habits in this sense, such as tendencies to be grumpy or cheerful, outgoing or shy, nervous or confident, impulsive or planned in action, extroverted or introverted, and so on are patterns of first-order states, which may be due more to contingencies of the individual's early environment, genetic endowments, social influences and accidental patterns of response, than to the agent's self-guiding will. Whatever responsibility we have for such features of our personality (and they are hardly irrelevant), virtues and vices cannot consist merely in habits of this sort. The "character-traits" we are looking for are instead those that constitute *volitional character*. To have definite traits at this level of character is to be in earnest about something. Being earnest or having volitional character in this sense is the opposite of the irresolution of immediacy, as Kierkegaard calls the default form of aesthetic existence. Yet such irresolution is still compatible with exemplifying habits and dispositions in the ordinary sense, or having first-order character. Many higher mammals can also be said to have habits and dispositions of this sort, and the first-order character-traits they constitute. But only persons are capable of volitional character constituted by patterns of earnest caring, and only persons can have moral virtues and vices of character.

Earnest dispositions and outward habits are also differently related to freedom. In earnest dispositions, the intelligible pattern consists in *repetition* in the existential sense, rather than simple *reiteration* of the same actions, desires, and emotions. In reiteration, the pattern becomes a 'second nature' to the individual. This does not mean it consists only of mindless routine or a blind tendency to a given kind of action, since the habit can involve patterns of thought, affect, and intention as well. But the entire complex becomes 'second nature' in the sense that it operates for the most part without the need for continued guidance, reaffirmation, and renewed resolve by the will in its libertarian freedom. Not so with caring, as Kierkegaard understands it. The dispositions of the higher-order will are distinct, in his analysis, because they involve a repetition of volition that is free in the libertarian sense, a continuity of *recommitment*. The kind of "volition" involved here is not a "choice" in the sense of simple *selection* between discrete alternatives laid out beforehand; rather, it is a movement of the self that has the potential to move in different ways, crystallizing its alternatives in the process.⁵³ So the "repeated" pattern is not simply made

up like a collage out of a sequence of isolated choices; rather, Kierkegaard thinks of each new moment of original rededication as conditioned, inclined, and shaped by the volitional character already acquired up to that point in the process. If the pattern were simply a mereological sum of radical choices, then each such choice would be all originality, without any conditioning by the past. On the other hand, if the pattern involved no libertarian freedom to deviate in the present from the volitional momentum already underway, it would be nothing but an entirely rote reiteration of the past, or at best the playing out of a program pre-established in a Leibnizian monad. "Repetition" instead names the kind of temporal pattern in which the factual hold of already-established tendencies and the transcendence of freedom are *combined*: the past is reinscribed, but in a moment of novelty. Thus particular volitional moments in such a pattern can be individuated only by abstraction, and they involve libertarian freedom in the sense that they are not totally *determined* by their preconditions, but still involve varying degrees of openness to different alternative ways of being. This is what makes these dispositions open-ended *processes* of freedom or 'narrative wholes' in which pattern and choice are reciprocally interconnected in relations that are continually renewed in the process. 'Dispositions of freedom' in this sense are self-guiding patterns, and, hence, qualitatively distinct from a pattern of mechanical repetition.

This picture of free self-determination as having an essentially narrative form as a holistic process fits well with Ed Mooney's argument that the event of "self-choice" is not so much an active selection among alternatives as a receptive embrace of the values, roles, and concrete potentialities that require our response.⁵⁴ The self as a self-forming narrative⁵⁵ requires the idea of existential dispositions of freedom. This picture of freedom is also arguably necessary to explain how it can be that "the narratives which we live out have both an unpredictable and a partially teleological character," as MacIntyre holds (AV 216). If so, then MacIntyre's analysis of virtues in terms of their role in unifying one's life actually requires something like Kierkegaard's novel conception of freedom, which is not to be found in Aristotle or Aquinas.⁵⁶ Still, MacIntyre (like Frankfurt as well) apparently remains opposed to the idea that the process by which our fundamental "commitments" are determined can involve freedom. In *After Virtue* he argued not only that (1) the self cannot be detached from "its social and historical roles and statuses" (with this much Kierkegaard agrees), but also that (2) I *am* the character defined by a set of "longest-term intentions" attributed to me by the community in whose narrative my character is inscribed (AV 217). More recently, MacIntyre has again insisted that our "mode of involvement in reality" (in Heidegger's terminology) is beyond the reach of libertarian freedom: "Our fundamental commitments are at a level quite other than that at which we make our choices."⁵⁷

I distinguish these two positions as (1) the thesis of the facticity of human selfhood, and (2) the thesis of 'narrative essentialism.' Existentialists accept (1) but reject (2), for reasons that become clear once we grasp how Kierkegaard's unique understanding of the relation between disposition, character, and freedom allows us to rethink this problem of "ownmost" or "highest-order" cares. For Kierkegaard's idea—one of his most subtle—is that there can be dispositions of libertarian freedom itself, or (equivalently) that libertarian freedom is actually *schematized* (in Kant's sense) in a temporally extended process of a peculiarly complex kind, in which the deep character already acquired through past attitudes of care both conditions and is partially reshaped through each new exercise of freedom in this process, in which we at the same time voluntarily shape our deep character. This idea, which is the inspiration for Heidegger's later notion of factual freedom or "thrown possibility," is the foundation of Kierkegaard's conception of virtue. Let us call volitional tendencies evinced by patterns arising in this sort of process *existential dispositions*. Earnestness is then the defining quality of such existential dispositions. And since any virtue-state must be a state of earnest will for Kierkegaard, all genuine virtues are existential dispositions (though not the reverse, since some existential dispositions are vices).⁵⁸ Other sorts of traits may be involved in evaluations of personality, e.g., why we like or do not like a person, or why we value or do not value them for various purposes, or why we can or cannot cooperate with them in various ways. But though such traits can be involved in various kinds of evaluation of the person, according to existential virtue ethics, they are not as central to moral evaluation of the person herself, which must instead focus primarily on her self-defining existential dispositions.

In this light, we can see why (1) and (2) are distinct, even though neo-Aristotelians tend to run them together. The facticity of selfhood (1) does not entail the distinctive idea of narrative essentialism (2), namely, that the free choices in which I write some aspects of my personal life-narrative or partially shape how this story unfolds must ultimately be referred (in order to be intelligible as *my* choices) to a set of longest-term intentions that are the deepest motifs running from the beginning to the end of my story, which I cannot myself have freely determined in any libertarian sense (on pain of infinite regress). The ingenuity of Kierkegaard's concept of freedom is that, without reducing this process to one of arbitrary choices, it gives freedom a place even in the deepest or ultimate core-narrative out of which the person-as-narrative-character partially writes itself (in negotiation with the factual limitations of nature and the intersecting narratives of its multiple social contexts). Thus this core-narrative is not random, but it is not a fixed 'essence' either. Even at the ultimate level of personal

identity, we do not simply play out a predefined role. Our individuality is not reducible to our simply *instantiating* a certain "story" about ultimate commitments or highest-order volitions, or a certain process of longest-term intentions, or any other ersatz construct of this kind. We do not have an 'individual nature' in any such sense. Thus, it is distinctive of existentialism not only to reject metaphysical essentialisms, or theories that identify the individual with a metaphysical essence of some sort (a monad, a noumenal substance, or a Molinist set of subjunctive conditionals), but also to reject narrative essentialisms of the sort proposed by MacIntyre, Scheler, and others in the phenomenological tradition.⁵⁹ Personal 'existence' does indeed precede 'essence' in these multiple senses, but without turning the person into a bare "pinpoint of will."⁶⁰

Medieval Virtues and Neighbor-Love

Kierkegaard's ethical thought can be situated within the traditions of virtue ethics and compared to MacIntyre's own contribution to these traditions in one further way. Although he lacks MacIntyre's more developed conception of human communities, Kierkegaard clearly takes engagement in practices and personal commitment to social roles to be essential to ethical life, and to require recognition of the authoritative moral norms and ideals of character needed for sustaining noninstrumental personal relationships, such as marriage (his paradigm case).⁶¹ But beyond the particular virtues required for devotion to any profession or style of life with shared standards of excellence defined in the history of the practice itself, Kierkegaard finally interprets moral virtue in terms of *agape* or neighbor-love.⁶² Among the many facets of neighbor-love he examines, Kierkegaard emphasizes "[h]ow deeply the need for love is grounded in the nature of man" as beings dependent on community,⁶³ and he repeatedly urges us to care unconditionally for the actual individuals we find before us, whoever they are and whatever they are like: "when it is a duty in loving to love the men we see, there is no limit to love. If the duty is to be fulfilled, love must be limitless. It is unchanged, no matter how the object becomes changed."⁶⁴ In calling love a duty, Kierkegaard implies that it is something categorically owed to the other person *qua* person, thus *agape* even "gives in such a way that the gift appears as if it were the receiver's possession."⁶⁵ But he also distinguishes *agape* clearly from the Aristotelian virtue of justice that "gives to each his own."⁶⁶ As the highest virtue, *agape* instead seems to combine aspects of justice and beneficence. Even though each person has this duty, my owing generous and attentive care to a universal range of others is not dependent in principle on anyone else *actually* loving me in the same way (though they ought to).

In his most recent book, *Dependent Rational Animals*, MacIntyre has clearly moved towards this Kierkegaardian position. He argues that to understand the "virtues of acknowledged dependence," we must see that "the central virtue exhibited in relationships of receiving and giving" is one that the conventional list of virtues does not name, which "has aspects of both generosity and justice" (DRA 120).⁶⁷ Although he distinguishes this virtue from *caritas*, which requires divine grace on Aquinas's account (as on Kierkegaard's), this virtue of "just generosity" is closely related to *misericordia* (or sympathy for suffering), which Aquinas treated "as one of the effects of charity" (DRA 124). "Just generosity" involves recognizing that I owe to all particular others a kind of "uncalculating giving" that responds to the basic reality of human dependence on "the attentive and affectionate regard of others" (DRA 121–22). While it is distinct from "blandly generalized benevolence," which only directs us towards "a generalized Other" (DRA 119), just generosity helps make possible a communal life of particular others pursuing common goods precisely by reaching beyond the contingent boundary of communal membership and recognizing the urgent needs of strangers as claims on us with no determinate limits, which may override "even claims based upon the closest of familial ties" (DRA 123–25).

Of course, MacIntyre does not construe his new emphasis on pity and generosity as Kierkegaardian: he regards it as a development of ideas introduced in his earlier discussions of medieval virtue ethics. In several works, MacIntyre has rightly emphasized that the tradition(s) of virtue ethics in ancient and medieval philosophy are far from monolithic. Unlike Aristotle, Stoics such as Cicero "provided classical authority for treating benevolence as a central virtue."⁶⁸ Similarly, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic scriptures emphasized "humility, patience, peacemaking, and charity, virtues either unknown or less important to the classical world."⁶⁹ The forgiveness and charity even towards corrupt persons that medieval virtue ethicists emphasized was obviously foreign to Aristotle's thought and to Greek virtue ethics in general: "There is no word in the Greek of Aristotle's age correctly translated 'sin,' 'repentance' or 'charity'" (AV 174). Thus in his thesis, Aquinas also emphasizes the importance of humility, and medieval narratives about virtue valued qualities such as "patience and purity" which made individuals resilient against the conflicts, instabilities, and sufferings of medieval life (AV 176–77).

Whatever his debts to Kant, Kierkegaard's conception of ethical personality clearly fits within this Christian subtradition of virtue ethics. Kierkegaard regards patience not only as a central social virtue but also as a religious virtue essential to developing one's relation with God. It is patience which in Kierkegaard's view makes possible the "unswerving" pursuit of good purposes, as opposed both to empty wishing and to

despair. And the patient will can earnestly pursue its purposes without desperation because it rests secure in "faith's covenant with the eternal, in hope's covenant with the future" (EUD 192).⁷⁰ Patience for Kierkegaard is a confidence of will that does not try to base its strength on its own fervor or enthusiasm. The impatient radical lacks this maturity of spirit: "He cannot and will not understand the slowness of the good, that in its compassion it is long-suffering, that in its love for the free it will not use its power, that in its wise understanding of the weak it shuns every deception . . ." (PH 62). At root, Kierkegaard thinks such impatience, which prevents authentic singleminded devotion to the good, is rooted in the agent's self-willful desire for personal glory, or "the good in its victory . . . through him" (PH 63).

Kierkegaardian existentialism, unlike its Nietzschean counterpart, does not conceive individuality as a distinction achieved mainly by the will to triumphal ascendance, but rather as requiring humility before a God who is encountered fully and personally only in a recognition of sinfulness. Our moral inadequacy is not constituted merely by our "guilt" for particular acts or omissions as violations of moral precepts, but rather by deep flaws of character, including a fundamental disposition to put oneself before others. These are flaws that can only be redressed through the acquisition of virtues—partly through our own will to self-reform, but also (as becomes apparent at the stage of faith) partly through grace.⁷¹ Thus Kierkegaard departs from Aristotle and follows the medieval tradition in holding that:

- (a) a corrupt person remains capable in principle (however difficult it becomes) of promoting the improvement of their own moral character over time;
- (b) some of the most important virtues are precisely those that facilitate, promote, and make possible such moral self-correction; and
- (c) nevertheless, given Augustine's recognition of the will's original capacity to "delight in evil" (AV 175), human character can never fully achieve its proper moral perfection without God's aid and mercy.⁷²

In other words, the virtues are volitional qualities of self-forming but still metaphysically dependent beings. As Robert C. Roberts put it, Kierkegaard ultimately rejects "a conception of virtue as unaided human accomplishment, perhaps something like Aristotle's picture of the magnanimous man who takes great pleasure in thinking himself glorious because of his courage, his generosity, his temperance, etc."⁷³ Kierkegaard also has plenty to say about how virtue can be manifested in human suffering even more profoundly sometimes than it is in active striving for the good (PH 99–120).

On these points, in following Aquinas, MacIntyre now finds himself in deep accord with Kierkegaard. While recognizing that Aristotle (like Aquinas and Merleau-Ponty) regarded the temporally-lived animal body as essential to the human self, MacIntyre now takes Aristotle sharply to task for his portrait of the magnanimous man as a "paragon of the virtues," since this fosters the illusion of the virtuous agent as "self-sufficiently superior," and makes Aristotle "unable to give due recognition to affliction and dependence" in his analysis of virtue (DRA 5-7). By contrast, MacIntyre notes Aquinas's rejection of "the attitudes of Aristotle's *megalopsychos*," and now emphasizes the "resources that [Aquinas] provides for an account of the virtues that reckoned not only with our animal condition, but also with the need to acknowledge our consequent vulnerability and dependence" (DRA xi). Although he still conceives dependence in broadly naturalistic terms, and does not include the final sort of existential dependence on God which Kierkegaard emphasizes, Kierkegaardians will regard MacIntyre's new dialectic of independence and dependence as a move in the right direction, since it gives greater centrality to such qualities as humility, gracious acceptance of help and being in others' debt, patience with others and with oneself, and purity of heart—the noble qualities that Kierkegaard believed are united in neighbor-love.

IV. Kierkegaard and MacIntyre: Complementary Existential Philosophies

In *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre portrayed Kierkegaard's notion of authentic self-choice as an attempt to find within the fragments of the failed Enlightenment tradition some residual basis for ethical norms. In "The Meaning of Kierkegaard's Choice" (reprinted in this volume) I argued that this was not Kierkegaard's intention in the discussion of 'self-choice' in *Either/Or* II: rather than trying to *ground* duties in a choice to acknowledge moral norms, his aim was to decipher how moral norms and ideals whose authority is already cognitively apprehended by the agent (at least in a partial and abstract way) can gain 'live' motivational significance for that agent, or concrete relevance in her life.⁷⁴

Given that *Either/Or* is not about trying to give ethics the kind of Sartrean basis that MacIntyre (rightly) rejects, what *can* it (and the other pseudonymous works) tell us about the authority of ethics? The answer depends on understanding Kierkegaard's relation to the history of ethics in a different way than MacIntyre construed it in *After Virtue*. Rather than trying to rescue the failing Enlightenment project (or Encyclopedia

tradition), as I have suggested, Kierkegaard is really picking up the fragments of the *Eudaimonist* tradition in the wake of the Reformation. The goal of his new synthesis is to reconstruct on a new basis what was valuable in eudaimonism, while recognizing that any acceptable understanding of free will must render untenable a fundamental claim of the primary Aristotelian version of that tradition. Thus, Kierkegaard's aim is to show how the *fact of freedom* can be reconciled with some crucial elements of the older teleological approach(es) to ethics, leading to what I have called an 'existential virtue ethics.' Ultimately, for Kierkegaard this ethics can be completed only within a religious context of faith, but (just as for the eudaimonists) the articulation of the "ethical sphere" in personal existence does not *start* from a basis in revealed religion or personal commitment to God.

If this hypothesis is right, then Kierkegaard's and MacIntyre's ethics should stand in a partially complementary rather than wholly hostile relationship. This is what we have already found, and further working out this complementary relationship will help clarify how Kierkegaard's reformation of eudaimonism works, and why it is motivated by problems internal to eudaimonism itself.

I will argue that MacIntyre's positive proposals for a virtue ethics in *After Virtue* work only if supplemented with something like Kierkegaard's conception of authenticity in *Either/Or*. While authenticity in this sense is not itself a formula for a virtuous life, but rather only a precondition of *both* genuine virtue and vice, Kierkegaard believes that it necessarily involves full recognition of the objective authority of ethical standards. On this view, an authentic agent who fails to live up to the relevant ethical norms cannot (without willing self-deception) avoid interpreting himself *as* morally blameworthy or as having negative moral worth. But this view faces the serious objection that it might be possible to live an authentic life guided and evaluated by standards or ideals that have no resemblance to traditional virtue-concepts, requirements of impartiality, or beneficence. Here I think MacIntyre can help Kierkegaard. Specifically, MacIntyre's argument concerning practices and the art of living a unified life as the final or embracing human practice provide the right model for developing Kierkegaard's own answer to the problem of 'authentic asceticism.' In developing this answer along MacIntyrian lines, we'll see that Kierkegaard's departures from the eudaimonist tradition(s) are modifications made from *within* that general approach. The modifications are required by problems with the classical formulation of eudaimonia as the chief good—problems structurally related to the inadequate role of freedom in these formulations. The resulting 'existential virtue ethics' involves a teleology which is sufficient to show that a nonemotivist ethics is an unavoidable part of a life with *human meaning*, even though this

imperative is more minimal and true to experience than that supplied by a fixed and ultimate desire for fulfillment or happiness in Aristotle's holistic sense.

Why MacIntyre needs Kierkegaard:

The Existential Significance of Practices

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre hoped primarily to show that "the Aristotelian tradition can be restated in a way that restores intelligibility and rationality to our moral and social attitudes and commitments" (AV 259). Building on Aristotle's functionalist approach to the human good, he argues (compellingly) that we can recognize a range of complex human activities or "practices" in which participants pursue various "goods internal to the practice" for their own sake (AV 187-88).⁷⁵ To count as a participant in a given practice is to value intrinsically the goods that can only be achieved through this kind of practice, whose pursuit requires following objective criteria of excellence developed in the history of the practice—and therefore "[t]o enter into a practice is to enter into a relationship not only with its contemporary practitioners, but also with those who have preceded us in the practice, particularly those whose achievements extended the reach of the practice to its present point" (AV 194). In other words, practices, even when apparently pursued in solitary devotion, are essentially *cooperative* activities as opposed to strategic games aimed at acquiring various "external goods" whose sum total is limited. On this basis, MacIntyre can argue that various *virtutes*—such as courage, honesty, and personal justice—can be provisionally defined as qualities of character that are necessary preconditions for sustaining the kind of human relationships essential to genuine participation in practices of all sorts (AV 191-93). MacIntyre completes this analysis in the next chapter by connecting it with a "narrative concept of selfhood" according to which "I am the *subject* of a history that is my own and no one else's, that has its own peculiar meaning" (AV 217). On this account, it becomes clear that "[t]he unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest." The virtues are necessary to sustain a life with a point, a life felt to be moving towards some worthwhile end—even if part of this goal is precisely better to articulate what goals we seek, and what ends are worth pursuing. Virtues are those qualities which every life-quest requires to excel as a life-quest: thus they define "the good for man," or the supreme good that every human life requires in pursuing and defining its own more peculiar goods, ends or goals (AV 219).

This argument is appealing in many ways, but suffers from two related and fundamental weaknesses. First, what can be said about someone who

wishes to avoid the commitments implicit in engaging in practices or intimate human relationships (whose cultivation, as MacIntyre urges, is also a type of practice)? They are not pragmatically committed to the authority of the virtues as preconditions for such practices, since they do not belong to any.⁷⁶ MacIntyre has not provided an argument that a life lived virtually without any prolonged engagement in practices would not be worth living. This might almost seem self-evident, since such a life would be one in which every paid job is merely a means to external goods and every unpaid activity is simply for "leisure" (amusement, entertainment, or distraction); yet many people surely do lead lives at least approximating to this description. But unless we can say why human persons as such need to engage in practices and commit themselves to developing the noninstrumental goods of human relationships, the pragmatic necessity of virtues will lack universal force for all human persons.

Second, likewise, what are we to say about someone who does not *want* to see her life in terms of a unified quest for some good, perhaps precisely because pursuit of any demanding or challenging goals of the kind that could give unity to a whole life requires virtues that enable one "to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations, and distractions" which beings like us inevitably encounter as obstacles to staying on course, maintaining our priorities, or keeping loyal to our commitments? (AV 219). These problems are made more acute by the fact that there is likely to be an overlap between those who avoid practicing any demanding art, pursuing any challenging ends whose attainment requires excellence, or cultivating any complex interpersonal relationship for the sake of its internal goods, and those who don't care about living a unified life (either in terms of its narrative intelligibility to themselves and others,⁷⁷ or in terms of formulating a more explicitly rational "life-plan" in Rawls's sense⁷⁸). As I have previously argued, this is precisely the initial and most common form of aestheticism, according to Kierkegaard's analysis.⁷⁹ So the possibility of aestheticism is a problem for MacIntyre's account. He can argue that such a person could not understand herself in terms of an intelligible life-narrative; but if the aesthete's existing short-term preferences and desires happen largely to be satisfied, perhaps she can be quite happy (though in a sense of happiness different from that achieved by Aristotle's virtuous man). So why are the virtues binding on her as moral ideals for human life?

It is important to see that this is not primarily a question about moral education, for MacIntyre was careful *not* to claim that his analysis should convince anyone (including aesthetes) to recognize that they should engage in practices, or try to live a volitionally unified life, and thus cultivate the social virtues as part and parcel of these general aims.⁸⁰ And the virtue-existentialist can agree that analytic philosophical argument is often unsuited to changing people's motivational and cognitive dispositions in

the ways needed to move them towards such a fully engaged life.⁸¹ The problem is instead a *theoretical* one about the adequacy of the concepts deployed in *After Virtue* to explain the authority of the virtues. MacIntyre is committed to the claim that the role virtues play in making possible cooperation in the practices and pursuit of subjective life-unity explain a major part of the authority of virtue-ideals. But this argument has a gap: it does not explain why aesthetes should be obligated to exhibit the social virtues.

In *Dependent Rational Animals*, MacIntyre may be trying to close this gap by focusing on the conditions of human interdependency, which provide further grounds for the social virtues. But our need for care, as dependent animals, does not by itself seem enough to explain why participation in practices and an effort to organize one's life as a coherent whole are both feasible for and required of persons. It seems that persons can alternate between being care-receivers and care-providers at different times of life without ever engaging in practices aimed at providing care, and without grasping this basic alteration or rhythm of human life as part of the unified narrative of their individual story. Of course they should, but we need to know more to see why this is so.

Kierkegaard's account of authenticity in *Either/Or*, and subsequent development of its themes in the other pseudonymous works, seems to address exactly these problems that prevent MacIntyre's analysis from reaching its goal. For the Judge argues in *Either/Or* II that "Every human being . . . has a natural need to formulate a life-view, a conception of the meaning of life and of its purpose" (EO II 179),⁸² and that we cannot have a meaningful and fulfilling life without authentically engaging ourselves in practices, or becoming authentically devoted to something worth caring about. Without involving our entire self in this way, we suffer from a dispersion of identity that leads not only to self-defeating incoherence but also to despair. Kierkegaard's aim is to show that the natural tendency or "teleology" of human selfhood (or maturation of the "spirit") is towards choices that involve commitments to substantive social roles (with functional definitions), engagement in practices (or vocations and callings), and the cultivation of human relationships. It is only in terms of such commitments, in the Judge's view, that the chooser can establish an intelligible self with a meaning that endures over time and thereby fulfills the existential *telos* of personal narrative unity. This 'minimal teleology' is towards a meaningful exercise of the human capacity to define oneself in terms of what Harry Frankfurt has called *cares*,⁸³ or what Bernard Williams has called *ground projects*.⁸⁴ We become authentic selves in Kierkegaard's sense only when we define ourselves in terms of such cares or projects.⁸⁵

Such self-definition, however, does not itself proceed from nothing, or from choices unguided by any prior criteria and constraints: it grows from a combination of particular experiences in time and an initial orientation

towards a meaningful life that is built into and already observable in the aesthetic initial position of human nature.⁸⁶ Authenticity is the 'proto-virtue' the attainment of which means moving in the right way from the aesthetic initial position towards a life of devotion to specific cares and ground projects, a life we can recognize as standing for something (in Cheshire Calhoun's phrase).⁸⁷ Thus, authenticity in this sense is the prerequisite for what MacIntyre calls "the place of integrity and constancy in life."⁸⁸ Ironically, then, Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* provides what is missing in MacIntyre's analysis: namely, an argument that grounds the necessity of engaging in practices and a committing oneself to the unification of life-goals in an account of the human *telos*. Kierkegaard shows the existential indispensability of precisely the sort of personal commitments that MacIntyre succeeds in linking to the virtues. However, in the process, the conception of our *telos* has changed in a subtle yet crucial way: what is basic is no longer eudaimonia or happiness in the holistic sense, but rather the existential meaningfulness of her life to the agent. Meaningfulness in this sense is a more minimal *telos* than eudaimonia, since eudaimonia entails meaningfulness but not the reverse.

But I have not yet shown that Aristotelian moral psychologists should accept this existential revision. To show that, I need to show not only that Kierkegaard's account has the resources to close the gap we found in MacIntyre's *After Virtue* account, but also to explain why the Aristotelian tradition lacks the resources to solve this problem. Aristotle's belief that *eudaimonia* defines a single ultimate *telos* for human life depends on the thesis that there is some way of unifying or harmoniously ordering all the intrinsically valuable ends we can pursue, or (equivalently) that there is a well-defined highest good that is not itself just one more item in the list of intrinsically valuable activities or products, but is rather what *embraces them all*. As Terence Irwin writes, "The most complete end is the one that includes the other ends; we are not to pursue an unordered collection of ends, but the complete single end that is the whole formed by them."⁸⁹ Jonathan Lear suggests that this inclusive ideal expresses Aristotle's hope "that it is at least possible for a man's motivational structure to form a harmonious whole."⁹⁰ This inclusive concept of the chief good also depends on the notion that desire for the one embracing good *underlies* desire for all other intrinsic goods—not that other intrinsic goods are a *means* to this embracing good, but because it is constituted by their right relation, the desire for the highest good flows through and is present in (ordinate and inordinate) desires for all the particular intrinsic goods. This transcendent desire is then the well-spring of the more particular desires not in the instrumental sense, but rather in the constitutive sense that we desire happiness itself *only by desiring* all these particular things in the right way. In Heideggerian terms, the desire for eudaimonia is the "jointure" of all

desires. On this view, the particular desires are expressions of the general underlying desire, radiating from it. Depending on the form they take, they will be more or less perverted or perfected expressions of the one true implicit desire.⁹¹

This idea of the chief good is certainly beautiful, but it was never plausible. Bernard Williams has challenged this notion of desire for an all-embracing good, arguing that the goods of practical reason and theoretical reason (which include creative genius) need not go together, and may even be incompatible in some cases.⁹² In particular, the virtues that contribute to the flourishing of social cooperation and family life may conflict with "the unimpeded development of human creative and intellectual aspirations."⁹³ This and similar tensions render it unclear why we should believe that there is any single embracing good such as eudaimonia that can play the role of Aristotle's inclusive 'chief good.' Happiness may instead be achieved in different ways of living, each of which aims at some set of goods that is internally consistent, but which conflicts with (some) other such sets of goods and their associated ways of living. Then although there may be various coherent ways to find fulfillment, since some of these are mutually unharmonizable, none of them will separately constitute happiness in the holistic sense of an all-embracing or chief good of all human desire. Neither can all these goods and all these ways of living be combined to form such a chief good.

Now the eudaimonist might respond that, if there is any way to compare the goods central to these conflicting ways of life, there must be some *maximally good* possible combination of them, although we cannot have them all. But aside from problems of comparison among incommensurable goods, the idea of a complete good was *not* the idea of a maximal good or best possible combination of the most weighty or important intrinsic goods; rather, it was the idea of a good that leaves out no desirable portion of any intrinsic good that is valuable for human life. In other words, it was a threshold concept, not a maximizing concept. The thesis that there is a chief good is not merely formal, but involves a substantive claim about the sort of goods that make human life fulfilling and their practical relationship to one another. As Williams has argued, this substantive claim is simply false: no possible combination of human goods reaches this threshold.

But although Williams does not notice this, his objection need not imply that a unification of our ends and ways of living for them is impossible. Paramount among a person's ground projects can be precisely a practical unification of her (other) ground projects. Frankfurt has argued that all persons automatically have this as their deepest ground project: since no one can be satisfied with volitional ambivalence and conflict in their cares, "It is a necessary truth about us, then, that we wholeheartedly desire to be wholehearted."⁹⁴ I think Frankfurt is on the right track here,

but his thesis as formulated is too strong: as Kierkegaard held, people sometimes work to remain ambivalent, although they never wholeheartedly will to reject the ideal of wholeheartedness.⁹⁵ But a weaker claim is true: for those of us who do unequivocally pursue wholeheartedness, this typically involves some readjustment of our different priorities, and sometimes the rejection of projects and ends incompatible with other commitments we find more important, until we have reinterpreted or refashioned our ground projects so that they are mutually reinforcing in spirit (rather than pulling in opposite directions), and so that they can all be pursued together (each in its proper respect) in one harmonious life. Let us call this the goal of *existential coherence*. All mature human agents wholeheartedly will this sort of practical coherence in their life.

What Williams's objection to Aristotle really shows, then, is *not* that such a practical or existential coherence is impossible, nor that pursuing it is unimportant, but rather that it cannot be all-embracing, and so its function and motive cannot be holistic eudaimonia as the chief good. For the conflict-between-intrinsic-goods objection shows that no good functions as Aristotle thought the chief good would function (there is no such complete good, at least in the span of mortal life). The goal of existential coherence or the practical unity of a life-narrative must therefore have some other basis than an ultimate desire for Aristotle's chief good: for the idea of such a chief good, which is supposed to consist in the natural harmony and embracing unity of all significant human goods, cannot be the motive for an effort of self-integration that aims at *bringing about* a unity that does not integrate all human goods, but only some set that can coherently fit together.⁹⁶

Kierkegaard's account remedies this error by reinterpreting the human *telos* as *authenticity* rather than holistic eudaimonia.⁹⁷ The realization of this *telos* requires the sort of self-integration and existential unity of life-narrative which in turn (as MacIntyre has argued) explains part of the practical necessity of the social virtues. Against this model of authenticity as the will to existential coherence, Williams's objection has no force: the fact that the different worthwhile ends we can find fulfillment in pursuing through the use of different natural capacities may sometimes conflict shows that they cannot all together constitute a unitary good called eudaimonia, but it does *not* show that the true human *telos* can be attained without an effort to identify and integrate some reconcilable subset of worthwhile ends to pursue in harmonious fashion.⁹⁸ To accept this alternative existential model is, however, to accept that the human *telos* (as authenticity) is not a chief good in Aristotle's sense. It is not the underlying object of all desires, but rather the end at which the will must aim if it is to aim at anything else in earnestness.

Since "earnestness" in Kierkegaard is the form of all the virtues (as I argued in section III), it operates in his thought much as the virtue of con-

stancy operates for Jane Austen, according to MacIntyre: "without constancy all the other virtues to some degree lose their point" (AV 242). Moreover, the same connection MacIntyre sees between the virtues of constancy, patience, and courage in Austen are apparent in Kierkegaard, since (as we have seen) he links courage and patience to earnestness. And MacIntyre sees the connection here: for Kierkegaard,

in the ethical life the commitments and responsibilities to the future springing from past episodes in which obligations were conceived and debts assumed unite the present to the past and to the future in such a way as to make of a human life a unity. The unity to which Kierkegaard refers is that narrative unity whose central place in the life of the virtues I identified in the preceding chapter. (AV 242)

This description of the continuity provided in Kierkegaard's view by an eternal ethical basis for the commitments and cares that give narrative unity to one's life may not do full justice to the notion of higher-order will it implicitly involves, as I have argued, but this passage is a clear enough recognition that Kierkegaard's existential proto-virtues (as I've called the dispositions of freedom involved in authenticity),⁹⁹ are indeed preconditions for all the other substantive virtues. As MacIntyre says earlier, "In some ways constancy plays a role in Jane Austen analogous to that of *phronesis* in Aristotle: it is a virtue the possession of which is a prerequisite for the possession of other virtues" (AV 183). The only difference is that MacIntyre (in line with his quasi-Marxist historical hermeneutics of values and institutions) suggests that the need for constancy or earnestness as a precondition of virtue is a peculiarly modern problem, one created only by the anonymity of industrial society and mass culture. Kierkegaard agrees that the circumstances of "the present age" have made the quasi-virtues of mature ethical agency more difficult to attain and maintain, but he nevertheless sees that the indispensable teleological role of these proto-virtues has an *ontological* basis in the initial default form of human selfhood. This default of 'chrysalis' stage is naive aestheticism, a virtually non-'spiritual' form of life without recognition of freedom and responsibility for one's character. The aesthetic individualism of modern life is thus only a symptom, not the whole cause, of the problem for Kierkegaard.

Why Kierkegaard Needs MacIntyre:

The Challenge of 'Authentic Aestheticism'

If this argument is right, then an account of virtues grounded in the necessary conditions of participation in practices and the unity of a life will be

complemented by Kierkegaard's account of the need to become a chooser in the ethical sense, or to become an agent whose choices find continuity in earnest commitments. But at this point, Williams could raise another sort of objection, one analogous to his well-known objection that our ground projects may conflict with the norms of both utilitarianism and Kantian morality: "somewhere . . . one reaches the necessity that such things as deep attachments to other persons will express themselves in the world in ways which cannot at the same time embody an impartial view."¹⁰⁰ The analogous objection to Kierkegaard is that we need not even see our ground projects in the light of thicker ethical distinctions (such as vices and virtues), or be disposed to evaluate them in these terms, because we may not care about being moral. Frankfurt apparently agrees with this view: he has argued not only (a) that our cares may not involve peculiarly moral concerns,¹⁰¹ and (b) that the "volitional necessity" of certain cares may conflict with ethical requirements for us,¹⁰² but also (c) that there is nothing about the nature of caring *per se* which suggests that it should be important to us to care about ethical distinctions.¹⁰³ For Frankfurt, then, it seems possible to build a unified life that is integrated solely around *aesthetic* projects in Kierkegaard's sense (perhaps Gauvain would be an example), without this requiring any special interest in or sensitivity to ethical distinctions. MacIntyre makes a similar point in his initial critique of Kierkegaard: the Judge in *EITHER/Or* incautiously assumes that "the energy, the passion, of serious choice will, so to speak, carry the person who chooses into the ethical," but on the contrary, "the aesthetic *can* be chosen seriously" (AV 41).

There is a real problem for Kierkegaard here. The problem is easier to explain if we distinguish between two aspects of "aestheticism." On the one hand, Kierkegaard portrays the "aesthetic" as one without authentic commitments, or as a "wanton" without higher-order volitions in Frankfurt's sense. Let us call this aestheticism₁. On the other hand, he thinks of aestheticism as the phase of life before the objective authority of ethical requirements and ideals has taken on any 'live' practical significance for the individual, beyond mere speculative contemplation. Let us call this 'innocence' of ethics aestheticism₂. In parallel, we will have two senses of authenticity that are the opposites of aestheticism₁ and aestheticism₂. We can now phrase the problem as follows: Williams and Frankfurt think it is possible to be authentic₁ (or nonaesthetic₁) in the first sense, while remaining aesthetic₂ (or inauthentic₂) in the second sense. In other words, they think it is possible to form a unified or integrated volitional character around a set of projects and earnestly to cultivate constancy in one's devotion to these aims, without taking much account of moral distinctions, or at least without giving them central or overriding significance relative to other persisting devotions, interests, or concerns. This frequent thesis in

late twentieth-century critiques of Kantian ethics in particular can thus be cast in Kierkegaardian terms as the problem of 'authentic₁ aestheticism₂'.

Note that this is not the other familiar problem of the 'authentic terrorist' or the 'authentic Nazi.' This objection has no force against Kierkegaard's account, since (unlike at least some of Heidegger's and Sartre's formulations) he is especially careful *not* to argue that all the substantive conditions of a good will are implicit in the requirements for authenticity.¹⁰⁴ This is part of the point of distinguishing the move from aesthetic indifference to ethical willing from the formation of a *good* will. Thus, in Kierkegaard's sense of authenticity, it is possible in principle to be an authentic torturer, as long as one is attuned to and can take seriously the wrongness of one's action. This sounds difficult, but there are examples of it (in fiction, perhaps Chillingworth in *The Scarlet Letter*, or Salari in *Mazzini*). For the proto-virtues of authenticity and earnestness—including courage, patience, and purity or constancy—are not by themselves *moral* virtue in the full sense.¹⁰⁵ In this sense it is possible to pursue evil ground projects authentically, in the full recognition of their evil. MacIntyre had to make a similar concession regarding the social virtues necessary to sustain practices: even evil practices may require and be sustained by these virtues (and thus virtues defined at *this* level do not supply the criteria for distinguishing good and evil practices) (AV 200).

According to Kierkegaard's moral psychology, it is also possible to pursue challenging and worthwhile but nonmoral goals seriously for the sake of the internal goods realized in their pursuit, and to cultivate various excellences in the process, while remaining *aesthetic* in one's deep character. But he always suggests that such a pursuit, however passionate it may seem, remains in some sense on the surface of personality. The serious aesthetic agent's entire attention is directed outward, and he lacks reflexive earnest concern about maintaining and ordering his commitments to form a stable identity over time. Such an agent therefore remains in "immediacy," and the conditions for his interests, concerns, and commitments remain outside himself, not under his control. In that sense, these ends cannot really constitute cares or commitments of the higher-order will if they are aesthetically pursued.

But Kierkegaard also held the stronger thesis that 'authentic₁ aestheticism₂' is not a mode of life we can maintain, because he thought that aestheticism₂ implies aestheticism₁ (or inauthenticity₁). Why should he have thought this? Why should he have believed that we cannot live a life united by ground projects with which we identify, or that we are deliberately engaged in forming and maintaining, *wisdom* at least taking seriously the content of ethics (including norms of action and virtues as ideals of character), even if we violate them?¹⁰⁶ In other words, why think (as Judge William implies) that the conscious formation of ground projects, the

investment of oneself in meaningful relationships and social roles, and engagement in practices *also necessarily involves* personally appropriating the binding force of moral norms, or becoming 'in earnest' about morality—even to the extent of recognizing that moral ideals should have overriding force for us (whether we actually follow their guidance or not)? As Peter Mehl puts it, "[Judge William's] conviction seems to be . . . that if an individual strives for autonomy he or she will come to appreciate the importance and role of social virtues;" but why think this involves any commitment to morality as opposed to mere convention?¹⁰⁷

Here MacIntyre's analysis helps us see precisely how this challenge is to be answered. His account of virtues internal to practices seems to provide most of what Judge William needs. For if MacIntyre is right, then when we move to an understanding of ourselves in terms of the commitments involved in caring about goods internal to practices and relationships in which we engage, then the objective authority of certain virtues, such as honesty, courage, justice, and integrity, must become important to us (even when we violate them). These moral ideals and the norms and precepts related to them must become, in Bernard Williams's terms, part of our subjective "motivational set" (our *S*). If we do not at this point take such norms seriously, or give them the status of reasons internal to our *S*, we will be guilty of a kind of pragmatic contradiction. This is the upshot of MacIntyre's analysis.

This argument complements and helps fill out Kierkegaard's own answer to the 'authentic aestheticism' objection. The Judge writes, "There comes a moment in a person's life when immediacy [or aesthetic sensitivity] is ripe, so to speak, and when the spirit requires a higher form, when it wants to lay hold of itself as spirit. As immediate spirit, a person is bound up with all earthly life, and now spirit wants to gather itself together out of this dispersion, so to speak, and to transfigure itself in itself; the personality wants to become conscious in its eternal validity" (EO II 188–89). But the human spirit can fully gather together its inclinations and desires for various earthly ends, its various worldly interests and pursuits, only by evaluating and ordering its motives themselves according to ethical criteria. No self-integration can be complete unless it is ultimately guided by values that have the distinctive universality and necessity of moral norms. Thus, as Alastair Hannay argues (in a Hegelian analysis of the implicit commitments of an agent seeking authenticity₁), "a will bent even single-mindedly upon worldly achievement lacks unity, [and . . .] it is an illusion to suppose that it does not."¹⁰⁸ For the eternity/universality of ethical norms and ideals provides the necessary *Ansatz* (in Fichte's sense¹⁰⁹) for authentic₁ self-integration. To call it an *Ansatz* is to say that in ethical necessity we find something radically *alterior*, something exterior to subjective perspectives of the mind, something that acts as a barrier to the dreaming conscious-

ness of aestheticism, something that is an unmistakable "reality-check."¹¹⁰ The eternal and universal significance of ethical necessity provides the only secure foothold upon which spirit can raise itself up in the ascent towards full selfhood. The ethical provides the stable basis on which the spirit can recognize itself as more than a mereological sum of different psychic states, as something that *endures* through time and can reidentify itself later in terms of the same eternal framework of interpretive significance.¹¹¹ Only in such a narrative framework of strong contrasts between good and evil, virtue and vice, do we find something in-itself immutable and firm (even if our consciousness of it is not) against which the value of different traits and tendencies of the character we are becoming stands out in clear relief. Against the background of this *final or widest evaluative horizon* of meanings, which transcends all the more conventional evaluative schemes we find nested within it, we can make strong evaluations not only of our outward options for actions, but of the different psychic tendencies latent, potentially present, or already active within us (e.g., various patterns of desire, emotion, interest, and concern). Only in this light can selfhood, in the form of an intrapersonal effort to organize these elements of our motivational character, really begin in earnest. For without such an objective basis, we lack a stable ground for this "work upon ourselves;" our efforts to guide and shape these raw ingredients into some greater whole will itself be guided by considerations too dependent on the shifting contingencies of time. Without ethics, we would have no absolutely firm point outside the stream of our own immediate first-order psychic states through which we could reflect back practically on them and thus arouse the higher-order volitional capacity to control these states that is characteristic of selfhood and determines all fully human virtue and vice. As Peter Mehl puts it, in the ethical I find "the point from which I can transcend the vicissitudes of time and context, and that is myself as a responsible agent, as spirit. Without this absolute foothold, the individual, the Judge suggests, would lack the philosophical basis from which to legitimately take up one posture rather than another."¹¹²

Pace Williams, then, Kierkegaard insists that personal commitments which entirely lack any basis in sensitivity to ethical contrasts (i.e., commitments that are "aesthetic" in Kierkegaard's wide sense of the term, which includes but goes beyond "aesthetic" projects in the narrower artistic sense), must therefore lack the kind of rationality needed if putative commitments are to have the sort of enduring stability in turn required for them to attain the resilience of wholehearted commitments, through which full narrative unity is attained in human life. The aesthete's goals, as Hannay says, by themselves lack the kind of significance needed to give meaning to a human life *as a whole*, and thus "the aesthetic life is in a crucial sense an empty one."¹¹³

This may initially appear to be a counterintuitive thesis, but it contains a deep insight. Kierkegaard allows that aesthetic life-views can sometimes have "a certain unity, a certain coherence" (EO 183); we can also have "infinite passions" for nonethical goals (or ends not pursued by the agent for the sake of their perceived ethical value). But he holds that such passions cannot *by themselves* constitute wholehearted cares and commitments.¹¹⁴ To attain that status, they must function as parts of larger projects that do have a moral basis for the agent. Thus the whole range of aesthetic significance is open to the ethical agent, but for her, aesthetic values are finally nested in the absolute narrative of moral values. However strongly an aesthetic passion is felt, its immediacy renders it too changeable for it to be the sole basis of a life in which the agent can find lasting and secure meaning. The well-known fickleness even of "infinite" aesthetic passions is a symptom of this deep problem: when in their grip, we think they are real commitments, but they are instead like fevers, bound to break after they have carried us to their culminating point, beyond which they inevitably lose their meaning for us. This fickleness does not mean that aesthetic motives cannot be genuine passions *while they last*, involving loyalty to corresponding aesthetic principles and even a form of purity that ignores other side-effects or consequences unrelated to the goal. It only means that this loyalty and purity cannot but be temporary, and must eventually fail the challenge of time. Like Ovid's demons, they are ultimately compelled to a sudden change of form, across which there can be no narrative continuity of volition. This point is developed in Kierkegaard's forceful critique of "will[ing] the great, no matter whether it is good or evil" (PH 30).

The reason for this inherent vulnerability of aesthetic passions is not only, as Judge William argued, that aesthetic ground projects or life-goals lead to despair when the external conditions of their success disappear, showing the aesthetic agents "that they had built their lives on something that was transient" (EO II 192). It is also that this liability to frustration leads too easily to the abandonment of the passion itself, because this passion is only an immediate desire for some goal external to the self. There is no basis here for a higher-order passion to preserve the passionate pursuit of this goal, whether or not its goal appears attainable. But ethical evaluation always forces us to this higher level: if it is right to pursue a given end in a particular way, then it is usually noble to preserve the passion itself, without discounting for the probabilities of success.

As the Judge argues, the final and most subtle aesthetic life-view (the one exemplified by his interlocutor A, the young man of *Either/Or I*) is the one that accepts this inevitable transience of passion, and even cultivates it. This "final esthetic life-view" recognizes the "vanity" of any more particular aesthetic passion as a basis for life, "for up to a point it has absorbed the nothingness of such a life-view" (EO II 194). Thus A avoids devotion to

any activity whose meaning would require continuity; he acts "with as little teleology as possible" (EO II 195). This negative pursuit of diachronic volitional disunity becomes for A the only commitment continuing through lived time. But this *maximally thin* form of volitional unity is the analogue in the volitional realm of absolute skepticism in the epistemological realm. It is a kind of suicide in which the will tries to destroy the very power that defines it: the power to form substantive commitments that can bind together personal agency across time. Far from attaining authenticity₁, it actively avoids it. Thus, again it appears that refusing ethical authenticity₂ entails a failure to attain narrative authenticity₁. The two sides of authenticity go together: this is why earnestness is the form of virtues, and why "the sin of not willing deeply and inwardly . . . is the mother of all sins" (EO II 189).

Precisely because no commitment can ultimately be maintained without foundation in a wholehearted will for the good, trying to maintain aesthetic commitments can be instructional: "an honest erotic love is also an upbringing to the good" (PH 35). Even though the relevant commitment here is not to the good, the agent will find that she can maintain it only by nesting it within ethical commitment (or by performing what the Judge calls the ethical transformation of aesthetic values). Thus the Judge's view that earnest willing leads human agents towards the good is reaffirmed in Kierkegaard's discourse on "Purity of Heart": "all roads lead to the good if the person in truth wills only one thing; and if there is indeed any truth in his willing one thing, this also assists him to the good" (PH 35). The formation of commitments functions in effect as practicing for the ethical (which is why A studiously avoids it): it leads us naturally towards the only adequate basis for such commitments, as long as we don't "swing off to the great instead of being led to the good" (Ibid.).

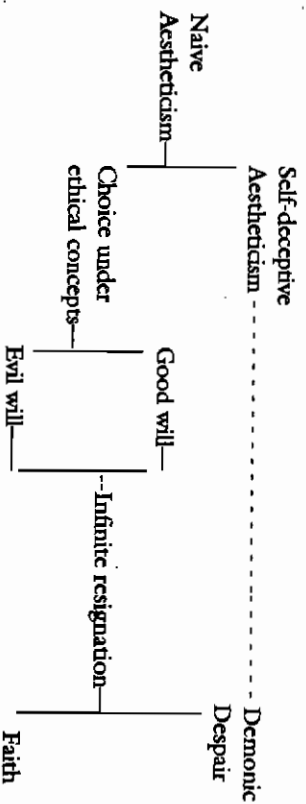
A full defense of the thesis that aesthetic passions lack existential resilience without an ethical foundation would require a rich enough phenomenology of caring to show that apparent counterexamples—lives apparently united around enduring aesthetic passions—were not really unified as they seemed, or were not united only or primarily by the relevant aesthetic concerns. Since third-party interpretation of lives is always a risky business fraught with uncertainties, such an argument for Kierkegaard's position could never be more than a plausibility-defense. But it is vital to realize that the same goes for the interpretation of lives Williams needs to support his counter-position. Any adequate existentialist answer to Williams's challenge must involve these difficulties, and cannot be decisive. But Williams can do no better: he cannot prove with demonstrative certainty that authentic aestheticism is possible. In response, the task of existential virtue ethics includes the development of a moral phenomenology that will make ever more plausible the Kierkegaardian thesis that narrative authenticity₁ without ethical authen-

ticity₂ is impossible. As I've suggested, MacIntyre has already contributed much of what this phenomenology will require.

V. Existential Teleology and Existential *Phronesis*

Minimal Teleology

Robert C. Roberts says, "An Aristotelian assumption operates throughout Kierkegaard's authorship, to the effect that human nature has fixed parameters that can be developmentally violated, all right, but to do so means, to one degree or another, failure as a person, and more or less obvious dysfunction."¹¹⁵ This is right in my view, except that this idea need not be specifically *Aristotelian*. The kind of teleology Kierkegaard finds in the normal course of development from latent "spirit" to full selfhood¹¹⁶ is not an Aristotelian teleology, because the true nature we must realize on pain of dysfunction is first specified only in terms of the selfhood of authentic commitments that may be either good *or* evil, and then at the next stage further specified in terms of the selfhood of recognized moral inadequacy and infinite resignation that can proceed either to faith or to demonic despair. This is what we might call a branching teleology:



The tendency latent in the nature of human spirit is to realize our freedom by moving from left to right through these stages. So the impetus to such movement is teleological: it is a movement towards the full expression of the personal form of being. The development of the human self thus has a definite direction from immature to mature. But the teleological distinction between regression and progression in spirit underdetermines our basic choice at each stage: the teleological requirements of fulfilling our potential for authenticity do not determine us to good will, and likewise, the requirements of fulfilling our highest potential for infinite resignation (the most we can achieve on our own) do not by themselves determine us

to faith as opposed to despair over the good and rebellion against creation. On the other hand, as we've seen, their underdetermination does not make the movement one way or another at these 'branches' simply arbitrary either.

Thus MacIntyre was partly right and partly wrong in claiming that Kierkegaard, like Diderot and Smith, rejects "any teleological view of human nature, any view of man as having an essence that defines his true end" (AV 54). He is right that Kierkegaard rejects *Aristotelian* teleology, but wrong to infer that he is therefore opposed to any account of human nature that counts as teleological. The rival existential version of human teleology is more minimal than the Aristotelian, since it conceives personhood as a process of freedom including certain forced choices, rather than as a substantial form involving a single encompassing definition of flourishing for beings with that natural kind. And thus on the existential version, the true teleology does only *half* the work of grounding the ethics of virtue that is proper for human life. Our existential teleology grounds the existential proto-virtues, and in addition shows why a meaningful life necessarily involves the sort of participation in practices and narrative unity of self that in turn requires other substantive social virtues. But this teleology does not ground the whole of morality: in particular, it does not explain the necessity of all natural duties, or of agape as the ultimate determinant of the good will. And what it does ground, it justifies by reference to the requirements of a meaningful life, rather than a life of eudaimonia as the chief good. Thus the human *telos* provides only a partial basis for ethics.

Hence my analysis in section IV remains compatible with the "autonomy" of the ethical discussed in the end of section II. The maturing self finds itself under moral obligation to form and pursue good rather than evil projects, and finally under religious obligation to choose faith over despair, but the *sui generis* status of natural duties and of agape as the highest virtue shows that the requirements ethics makes on our freedom are at least *partially* independent of the teleological requirements of becoming a self. In other words, Kierkegaard is committed to a kind of realism about ethical values, but without their full reduction to teleological facts.

Evil as a Positive Alternative

This deep difference results in part from Kierkegaard's absolute rejection of Plato's doctrine of motivation by the apparent good. This doctrine had at least two essential aspects:

- (1) If I desire or am moved to attain some end E, then I regard E as good or as contributing to well-being in some relevant sense (some

sense that could be referenced in an intelligible explanation of an action directed at E).

- (2) If I regard some possible end of action E as good or as contributing to well-being in some sense, then I will have some desire for E or be moved in some way (however limited it may be) to attain E.

Aristotle, notably, rejected the further Platonic claim that

- (3) that if I act to attain some end E, this can only be because my reason recognized the value of E as the best I can achieve in the circumstances.

Aristotle allowed for the possibility that we could act against the judgment of practical reason out of anger or other strong appetites. It is more questionable whether his account of *akrasia* rejects (2) and allows for the possibility of recognizing the value of some possible object of action without any commensurate motivation towards this object at all. But he does not reject (1), since he holds with Plato that we always act for the sake of *some* apparent good, even if not the best we know. Aquinas follows him in this.

By contrast, Kierkegaard denies not only (3) and (2) but even (1). Just as in the *Fragment*s he rejects the Socratic doctrine that all knowledge depends on immanent sources universally latent in human nature, in the *Sickness Unto Death* he rejects the Socratic doctrine that evil derives from ignorance, that the wrongdoer must not have "understood what is right" (SUD 94). He says: "This means the Greek mind does not have the courage to declare that a person knowingly does what is wrong." But the capacity for wrongdoing Kierkegaard has in mind here is not simply *akrasia* in Aristotle's sense, which gives us only one way in which people may do what they know is worse. Rather, Kierkegaard has in mind a more radical capacity for rebellion, which is clarified only in the revealed doctrine of sin: "sin is not a matter of a person's not having understood what is right but of his being unwilling to understand it, of his not willing what is right" (SUD 95). There is an apparent paradox here: Kierkegaard seems to connect passionate pursuit of what we clearly recognize that morality forbids and an effort *not* to clearly recognize the content of morality. Unlike Socrates, who does not distinguish inability and unwillingness to see the good, when someone does not act in accordance with the moral understanding we may expect of them,

Christianity goes a little further back and says that it is because he is unwilling to understand it, and thus again because he does not will what is right. And in the next place it teaches that a person does what is wrong (essentially defiance) even though he understands what is right, or he refrains from doing what is right even though he understands it. . . .

Therefore, interpreted Christianly, sin has its roots in willing, not in knowing, and this corruption of willing affects the individual's consciousness. (STUD 95)

*The Reciprocal Relation between Choice
and Moral Sensitivity*

To make sense of this, we have to understand it in terms of a complex reciprocal linkage between two analytically distinguishable psychological processes. Think of our present cognitive grasp of shared ethical values and norms as forming a *background* against which we make particular decisions in the course of ordinary life. Behind this background, and thus often invisible to the consciousness in which we consider our options, is an acquired volitional character—including commitments formed by past choices—that conditions both how we understand our various options and to what extent they are volitionally possible for us, though it does not *determine* our present decision. Different parts of the background are brighter or dimmer, according to what we might call (in Kierkegaard's terms) their *subjective relevance* to our lives as lived so far, or in what ways we have appropriated them into our character. The brightness of some parts of the background thus indicates both the motivational hold of these values on our character, *and* how circumspect and clear our understanding of these values is. In this model, then, there is an intimate connection between the volitional significance that ethical values have for us and the phonetic depth of our awareness of them. Against this background of ethical understanding, it is difficult, but not impossible, to choose commitments and particular actions we know with great clarity and force to be despicable, dishonorable, dishonest or deceitful, cruel, callous, uncaring, and so on. Yet if we do will against our conscience or present sense of how to apply such evaluations (either through some great crime or, more likely, via the accretion of many smaller 'venial sins') then the entire background of moral understanding—or at least relevant parts of it—shifts away from us, dimming both in conceptual clarity and gerundive force or hold on our will. In short, the reciprocal relation between moral cognition and moral motivation in the temporal flow of human existence means that conscience fades with persistence in evil. In particular, the distinctness and motivational force of moral knowledge can fade by attrition, not only by more dramatic movements of radical evil:

In the life of spirit there is no standing still (really no state either: everything is actuation); therefore, if a person does not do what is right at the very second he knows it—then, first of all, knowing slumbers down. Next comes the question of how willing appraises what is known. Willing is dialectical and has under

it the entire lower nature of man. If willing does not agree with what is known, then it does not necessarily follow that willing goes ahead and does the opposite of what knowing understood (presumably, such strong opposites are rare); rather, willing allows some time to elapse, an interim called "We shall look at it tomorrow." During all this, knowing becomes more and more obscure, and the lower nature gains the upper hand more and more. . . . (STUD 94)

This danger of losing one's conscience by sheer attrition and irresolution is the reason why courage becomes a key existential virtue for Kierkegaard, since it forces us to face and care about arduous demands, even if we cannot immediately (or ever fully) live up to them. On the other side, consonant with the tradition, Kierkegaard's model implies that as long as we are still living selves, we never completely lose our volitional/cognitive connection to moral norms and ideals:

the good, the truly great and noble, has the quality of not allowing the observer to be indifferent. It elicits a pledge, as it were, from the person who has once caught a vision of it. However deep that person sinks, he never actually forgets it completely; even in his reprobate state, this recollection is certainly a torment to him, but also at times a deliverance. But just as it lifts a person up, so also it humbles him, because it requires of him all his power, yet retains the authority to call him an unworthy servant even when he has done his utmost. (EUD 359)

This is why cowardice and pride do not simply encourage our violation of recognized ethical demands, but also to numb us to such demands, suppressing our awareness of and sensitivity to ethical considerations understood as such.

Kierkegaard's sharp rejection of the Socratic/Platonic model of moral motivation and knowledge thus implies that we have many ways of knowingly feeling, willing, and doing wrong. This means that we have to reject any teleological account of human nature built on the notion that human motivation strictly follows the mind's judgment of the apparent good. We cannot expect to realize our *telos*, or fulfill the human destiny that it will be the function of human virtues to help us attain, simply by enlightenment of the mind, as Plato hoped. But nor can we acquire the qualities needed to realize our nature or fulfill our essence simply by being lucky enough to get the right kinds of training and habituation in our youth. Only through earnest willing in the face of alternative possibilities, which involves a process of cultivating our own entrenched dispositions of freedom, can we become thoroughly devoted to the goods we are meant and required by moral ideals to pursue. This is the position of *existential* virtue ethics. But it does not mean that we become full selves devoted to the good purely by

our own bootstraps: the development of an earnest will may have a myriad of social conditions that are necessary though not sufficient for it.

I have argued that the elements of such a position can be found in Kierkegaard's *Sickness Unto Death*, *Concept of Anxiety*, and the *Works of Love* in particular. But despite the distinctiveness of his overall position, the phenomenology of moral values Kierkegaard gives us in his analysis of the relation between will and knowledge is in other ways in deep accord with virtue ethicists such as Aristotle, Aquinas, McDowell, and MacIntyre. In his phenomenology, ethical values have a dual status in our consciousness: they are never simply believed or judged to be true, nor simply followed by the will as pure imperatives. Rather, as intentional objects, ethical values always appear to us in some superposition of both these intentional dimensions. As their motive force fades towards nothing, they tend to become mere speculative beliefs in which we are largely uninterested, but for this reason the beliefs themselves also tend to become more schematic and abstract, rather than finely articulated with a view towards a horizon of live potential applications in our future. Oppositely, the more we tend to feel ethical values as imperatives with personal relevance for our practical questions, the more likely our interested attention is to discriminate nuances in their content that become clearer in the process of trying to live according to such values.

Thus, if the virtuous person is, as Aristotle thought, the one who is *synesis* to the right considerations in judging how to act in a variety of concrete circumstances calling for the exhibition of different virtues, then the required "sensitivity" will involve precisely the combination of subjective appropriation of—and phronetic aptness with—moral values that we find in Kierkegaard's psychology of the ethical and religious stages. His contribution to this central theme in the tradition(s) of virtue ethics is to emphasize how vital the development of authentic will is to the attainment of such sensitivity and responsiveness to moral concerns. The intrapersonal attitude of concern about the desires on which one acts and concern for one's individual character, which is the beginning of authenticity, does not by itself constitute the moral sensitivity of virtuous agency, but it is nevertheless essential for forging the key bond of relevance between our initially vague and abstract understanding of ethical norms or ideals and the task of evaluating our own actions, character, and life-narrative as lived so far, with a view towards continuing or changing features of this narrative in the future. Only when this vital connection is made can both the cognitive and motivational sides of moral sensitivity grow together in the process of living lives centered around particular cares and projects under the increasingly firm guidance of moral precepts and paradigms.

But, coming back finally to *Either/Or* II, although this vital connection originates in what Judge William calls the decisive step from the aesthetic

to the ethical mode of existence, we should not be deceived by his emphasis on the instant of transition. For at the level of our deep self or core narrative, this instant can only be an imaginary abstraction. If the "choice" of ethical over merely¹¹⁷ aesthetic existence is the forging of the bond between the cognitive and motivational sides of moral sensitivity, then this "choice" is not a sudden leap between life-spheres but rather a continual process in which these two aspects of moral sensitivity—which are at the start only weakly linked by a thin strand of volition (or latent "spirit")—grow steadily stronger together, and become ever more fully interwoven in their symbiotic relationship.

Properly understood, then, the "choice" of whether to deepen one's commitment to ethical mode(s) over aesthetic mode(s) of life, which is initially made ever so tentatively (or almost unconsciously), lies *virtually* behind every more particular choice between good and evil, or virtue and vice, since these particular choices determine whether the cognitive and motivational significance of these very distinctions weaken or strengthen for us. The increasing salience of this moral background—this practical horizon for our action in the external world and our work on ourselves as individuals—is the development away from the aesthetic towards the ethical and religious modes of life. To differentiate between this vertical dimension of cognitive/motivational development and the horizontal oppositions in the ethical value of the options between which we choose in any present circumstance, Kierkegaard distinguished the aesthetic/ethical contrast in life-stages from the good/evil contrast of moral evaluation. But he never meant to say that these two pairs of phenomena are dynamically unrelated in human life, or that their existential relation is simply that second pair (moral vs immoral) is just *posita*d in consciousness by electing the ethical over the aesthetic in the first pair. On the contrary, these two poles of opposition are organically related dimensions of one single developmental complex (the human spirit or free will). The more we choose good over evil, or the more firmly we commit ourselves to virtuous motives and dispositions (which are united in *agape*) in forming our projects, the keener our moral sensitivity grows, and the stronger becomes the bond between our cognitive receptivity to moral considerations and our volitional disposition to be guided by such moral understanding. And the strengthening of this bond, as both sides of moral sensitivity develop together, is perseverance in the "choice" of ethical over merely aesthetic sensibility.

Hence, the choice between the aesthetic and the ethical is not what it first seems. It has its start in moments of existential courage, when we open ourselves in some way to a maturing of spirit, and some new increment of initiation into moral sensitivity. The possibility of such an opening is built into the human spirit: we have an innate capacity to discover the limitations

of aesthetic sensibility, and to feel the absence of higher kinds of sensitivity as voids of meaning in our lives. This is ultimately what explains how our movement from the aesthetic to the ethical frame of reference can be rational, as Marilyn Priety has argued. I have altered her explanation only by emphasizing that our teleological orientation is towards the maximally meaningful frame of reference (rather than simply to infinite happiness or beatitude, which is a goal that becomes intelligible only within that frame of reference). In these terms, we can within our initial frame of reference discover or become sensitive to the possibility of richer and higher frames of reference into which we could enter.¹¹⁸ But this latent capacity within us does not begin to unfold without something akin to willing participation on our behalf. It must be carefully nurtured and cultivated, first by significant others in our milieu, but then also by we ourselves, on the basis of whatever limited resources in moral understanding we have so far been able to acquire. Yet once it has started to have a significant role in our lives, moral sensitivity grows as we attend to it, or atrophies as we suppress or ignore it when convenient. The courage to let such sensitivity develop and gain a hold on us itself grows in a self-reinforcing circle the longer and more profoundly we continue to follow it, especially if we hold to it through dark periods in life. This is difficult for more than one reason. For the outcome of this process is a moral sensitivity articulate enough to make our imperfections stand out in stark relief, and powerful enough to move us in the end to a kind of ethical despair about the world, and over ourselves.¹¹⁹

Then finally we have reached the threshold of that type of consciousness which includes not only aesthetic and ethical sensitivity but also a sensitivity to the divine which (paradoxically) unites them through hope and faith in eschatological possibilities—the consciousness which Kierkegaard calls religious. That is a further story, which we would have to trace to get Kierkegaard's complete conception of existential virtue fully in view. But since that story of the religious cannot be understood without first having an adequate interpretation of the ethical stage, I have concentrated in this paper on outlining the more general form of existential virtue ethics that need not involve faith.

Conclusion

As I have described it, the project of existential virtue ethics is to reinterpret the social virtues and their teleological basis in a manner consistent with the freedom that defines personhood. Given this constitutive freedom, personhood is not a kind-essence, and so the specifically Aristotelian ambition to provide a complete rational foundation for virtue ethics solely on the basis of a teleological analysis of human nature *alone* is manifestly

unrealistic: if it avoids fatal non-sequitur, this project will either yield an insufficiently substantial set of moral demands on character, or it will distort our understanding of human personhood in ways that deny or understate the essential place of libertarian freedom in order to generate the result that evil commitments are less "natural" for us than good commitments. It is because the eudaimonistic project is bound to fail in this way that Kierkegaard revises it, developing a new philosophical anthropology in which the essential place of libertarian freedom can at last be fully recognized *without* giving up the notion that the self has an inherent teleology that is organically linked to the role of ethical norms and virtue-ideals in human life—a teleology that still provides *part* of the basis or the authority of those norms and ideals. This project of existential virtue ethics is more honest about the nature of personhood and about the ways in which virtue-ideals can be grounded on it, but without simply disconnecting the virtues from their basis in human moral psychology and the factual conditions of temporal, finite, mortal existence. And unlike both the enlightenment and eudaimonist projects, we have not found any reason to think this project has to fail on its own terms.

NOTES

1. See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), ch. 3. All further references to this text are given parenthetically with the abbreviation AV.
2. For example, Ronald de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion* (MIT Press, 1987), takes over this conception of existentialism from Solomon. After arguing for his neo-Freudian view that "the canons of normality according to which we must assess the rationality of emotions are ultimately *indefensible*," he adds: "This doctrine must not be interpreted in the existentialist manner, as placing the origins of value wholly in authentic individual choice" (p. 303).
3. Compare this sketch to Michael Walzer's brilliant summary of a typical communitarian caricature of modern western liberalism (written largely in response to MacIntyre) in "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism," *Political Theory* 18, no. 1 (February 1990): 6-23, pp. 7-8.
4. On the liberating value of this theme, and its difference from autonomy conceived as "self-determining freedom," see Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 28-29. Compare Kierkegaard's view that each individual has a unique mission or calling: "Every man is endowed by guidance with distinctiveness. The meaning of life, then, should be to carry through this distinctiveness. . . . Every distinctive character (as indeed everyone originally is) successfully prosecuted is a real enrichment, a plus which enters the world. . . ." (JP 51 XI A177). See *Søren Kierkegaard's Papers and Journals: A Selection* (Penguin Books, 1996), p. 630.

5. Via the notion that it is the most extensive set of property rights that creates the most unregulated market economy in which unchecked market forces create the greatest GNP, and hence the highest average utility. This is the myth of "the old rights-utility synthesis via the market," as my teacher Ian Shapiro used to say.

6. Thus it is no accident that from the beginning of the twentieth century, neo-Thomist and existentialist themes were frequently combined, *personally*, in theological works. We can see this especially clearly in the genre of *personally*, represented by such authors as Emmanuel Mounier, Jacques Maritain, John MacMurray, and the early Paul Ricoeur. The contemporary assumption that there is a diametrical opposition between existentialism and virtue ethics would have been unthinkable to these authors (and indeed Ricoeur has resisted this assumption even in recent works like *Oneself as Another*).

7. See MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (p. 67 and pp. 248–50). MacIntyre's phrasing is more radical here, since he rejected the notion of "human right" *tout court* (although his view may have changed since *After Virtue*). But this seems to be precisely because he insisted that rights can only be political norms, while he took all talk of human rights to be about prepolitical abstractions. Since Gewirth and Nozick, however, Jürgen Habermas has given us a new non-libertarian account of how political rights derive from moral norms and these in turn from the implicit commitments of language-using human agents who seek cooperatively to validate practical claims. MacIntyre's critique of Gewirth and Nozick thus does not hold against this new and much more sophisticated account, which seems to demonstrate that a system of social organization based on the rule of law must recognize certain basic human rights or fall into pragmatic contradiction. This is an argument that in my view both existentialists and virtue ethicists can and should now accept without abandoning the rest of their projects.

8. Of course, this point of contact coexists with other profound differences: Kierkegaard is a *kind of poet* (in Louis Mackie's phrase), and also a devotional writer, neither of which apply to MacIntyre; on the other hand, MacIntyre is a *kind of historian*, and also a kind of radical critic of contemporary politics, neither of which were Kierkegaard's particular strengths. Although their conceptions of authorship itself are quite different, MacIntyre and Kierkegaard are nevertheless closer to each other than they are to most other twentieth-century philosophers in aspiring to have an unsettling impact on the self-satisfied presumptions of their society.

9. At one point, MacIntyre implies that Kierkegaard's conception of the ethical is entirely Kantian: "Promise keeping, truth-telling and benevolence embodied in universalizable moral principles are understood in a very simple way" (AV 43). But despite his enormous debts to Kant, Kierkegaard clearly did not think that rational autonomy alone sufficed for moral virtue. Although Judge William in *Either/Or* says that he will not treat the content of the choice between good and evil ("the choice posited in and with the first choice"), he says bluntly, "I am no ethical rigorist, enthusiastic about formal, abstract freedom" (EO II 178). Instead, throughout *Either/Or* II, the transformation of erotic into conjugal love provides the basic paradigm for ethical maturity. The unification of personality is the prerequisite to ethical life because without it, authentic love is impossible: "the person who cannot open himself cannot love, and the person who cannot love is the

unhappiest of all" (EO II 160). Many other connections to the tradition of Christian virtue ethics are apparent in the text. For example, in criticizing A (the aesthetic hero of *Either/Or* I) for sharing fundamentally the same "life-view" as the lowest egoistic pleasure-seekers, the Judge argues that all aesthetes base their happiness entirely upon things that depend on externally given conditions, which are not within their control in the same way as virtues of character: e.g., physical health, beauty, wealth, honor, romance, the development of some talent, or (worst of all) the pursuit of whatever multiplicity of desires we find in our psyche (EO II 180–85). This is simply one more version of the most time-honored argument in the eudaimonist tradition, as found in Socrates's *Apology*, Plato's *Republic*, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and Aquinas's *Summas*, and many lesser works: secure happiness cannot be based on things as insecure as power, fortune, fame, honor, or even mortal life itself.

10. Kierkegaard, "Against Cowardliness," in *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press, 1990): 347–76, p. 357. Further references to discourses in this book are given parenthetically with the abbreviation EUD.

11. In light of Kierkegaard's interpretation of courage as an existential virtue in this crucial edifying discourse, we can now see that he understands the transition from the aesthetic to the ethical as a movement guided by the felt need for courage, or as the courageous choice that makes possible all more specific forms of courage in loyalty to particular persons or causes, or in heroic allegiance specific responsibilities in spite of difficulties encountered in doing "what nobility requires."

12. See Charles Taylor, "What is Human Agency?," in *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers I* (Cambridge University Press, 1985): 15–44. Taylor notes that the richer language of essential contrasts involved in "strong evaluation" is necessary for the articulation of virtues such as courage, which require an agent to be moved by a desire or disposition seen as *qualitatively higher* than "mere impulse" (p. 25, note 8).

13. This is the sort of language Elizabeth (G.E.M.) Anscombe asks for in her famous essay, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33 (1958). Obviously we could add other virtue terms to the list.

14. See Charles Taylor, "Self-Interpreting Animals," *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers I*: 45–76, p. 67.

15. James Collins, *The Mind of Kierkegaard* (Princeton University Press, 1983 paperback reprint), p. 43.

16. For an exploration of this concept, see Samuel Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism*, Rev. ed. (Oxford University Press, 1994). Also see my discussion in "The Ethical and Religious Significance of Taciturnus's Letter in Kierkegaard's *Stages on Life's Way*," in the *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Stages on Life's Way*, ed. Robert Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000).

17. See my paper, "The Ethical and Religious Significance of Taciturnus's Letter in Kierkegaard's *Stages on Life's Way*."

18. See J.L.A. Garcia, "Lies and the Vices of Deception," *Faith and Philosophy* 15, no. 4 (October 1998): 514–537, p. 523. In this passage, he means to define what he calls a "categorical imperative," as opposed to a "patient-focused" ethics that determines the virtue or vice of the agent's "personal attitudes (and,

derivatively, the actions to which they give rise)" according to how these help, benefit, or respond appropriately to the patients on whom the agent is acting in various role-relationships. But Garcia here falls into the Williams-fallacy of conflating the universally required with the impersonal. For Kierkegaard, the duty of age is both categorical in the (true) Kantian sense of being universally necessary for all responsible agents, and incidentally impartial in the sense of being a duty to all persons as such, and "patient-focused" in Garcia's sense.

19. Although this is clear enough from various passages scattered throughout his works, such as the one quoted above on cowardice, in attributing a broadly astatic conception of the ethical to Kierkegaard, I do not mean to imply that he attempts anywhere in the pseudonymous works which focus on the existential stages to give us very much of the content of such a normative ethics. Instead, in these works we get only fragments or isolated parts of a moral catalogue of virtues, such as the virtue of the father in loving his children (in *Fear and Trembling*). There are more hints and suggestions about the content of ethics in some of Kierkegaard's various "edifying" or "upbuilding" discourses, but these works are not parts of a systematic normative ethics: rather their normative themes are usually introduced in the course of developing other psychological and religious themes. *Works of Love* is Kierkegaard's only book specifically on normative ethics, but I think we can understand how the ideals of this work fit with and develop ethical themes earlier in his authorship by reconstructing the implications of the fragmentary clues given in the pseudonymous works and edifying discourses.

20. Elizabeth (G.E.M.) Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* Vol. 33 (1958).

21. Roger Crisp and Michael Slote, eds., *Virtue Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 1997): Introduction, p. 4.

22. Garcia, "Lies and the Vices of Deception," p. 522.

23. See the discussion of "the Christian imperative" in Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*, section II A, p. 40. Note that for Kierkegaard what love requires cannot be captured in terms of moral laws, or codified in a finite list of precepts: see the discussion of love as the fulfillment of the law in *Works of Love*, section III A, p. 110.

24. Likewise, I think both Kierkegaard and MacIntyre favor what Michael Slote calls an "agent-focused" rather than an "agent-based" version of virtue ethics: see Slote, "Agent-Based Virtue Ethics," in *Virtue Ethics*, ed. Crisp and Slote: 239-62. For agent-based views "treat the moral or ethical status of actions as *entirely* derivative from *independent* and fundamental ethical/arctic facts (or claims) about the motives, dispositions, or inner life of the individuals who perform them" (p. 240, my emphases). But while St. Thomas and Kierkegaard may conceive the rightness or wrongness of an act as dependent in various ways on the motive behind it, they both seem clear that the ethical value of one's character is also partially a function of the ethical value of its fruits, i.e., the actions it actually prompts and guides.

25. *Ibid.* p. xii.

26. Robert C. Roberts, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and a Method of 'Virtue Ethics'," pp. 150-51. Roberts cites the older edition of this work, which was titled *On Authority and Revelation*, tr. Walter Lowrie (Princeton University Press, 1955).

27. In his article on "Virtue Ethics" in the *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, MacIntyre emphasizes that "Aristotelian and Thomistic theses about the virtues are integral parts of complex, unified bodies of political, psychological and metaphysical theory" (p. 1281, col. 2). Although Kierkegaard rejects the notion of a philosophical "system" in Hegel's sense as a theory that claims complete gnostic comprehension of the laws governing changing and particular forms of inward consciousness and outward life in temporal existence, he does clearly base his notion of ethical personality on a complex moral psychology and closely connected metaphysical distinctions between the particular and universal, the temporal and eternal, lived experience and speculative concept or essence, actuality and possibility, and so on.

28. Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard* (Routledge, 1982), p. 210. He goes on to emphasize Kierkegaard's agreement with Kant that this religious conception of the highest good "cannot provide an incentive to moral practice," but must rather be the upshot of moral practice followed for its own sake (pp. 212-13). MacIntyre says the same of Aquinas: virtues are a means to our supernatural end only in the "internal" sense (AV 184). It would be clearer, I think, to say that this is not a means-end relationship at all.

29. They are not empirical naturalistic facts in the sense of Humean realisms, but neither are they abstract facts, universals, or conceptual truths of reason. They seem rather to form a distinct subclass of the synthetic/*a priori*.

30. In this usage "*telos*" does not mean all that it did in the classical usage. In particular, it does not mean the good (or embracing set of first-order goods) that gives life meaning. In my present, more minimal sense, it denotes an end that it is built into our nature to seek, or the terminus of a process that it is built into our nature to go through in the normal development distinctive of or essential to our kind of being. I think this shows that Quinn and MacIntyre's dissatisfaction with my description of authenticity as a kind of *telos* turns mainly on a verbal or terminological point. For I do not mean to claim that authenticity as the formal condition for narrative meaningfulness of human lives is our *telos* in the full classical sense, i.e., that it is the worthwhile end the seeking of which makes life truly fulfilling. MacIntyre is quite right that authenticity or narrative meaning itself cannot be the first-order goal the seeking of which makes life *meaningful*, let alone happy. Authenticity is instead the formal second-order condition on the volitional pursuit of first-order goals and projects, the commitment to which can satisfy our need for meaning. The process of becoming authentic is therefore our *telos* in my weaker sense of that concept. (I apologize here for any confusion my somewhat novel usage has caused, and I would be willing to use another word for "*telos*" in my more minimal sense if I could think of an appropriate one).

31. Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, p. 64. Although (like me, and unlike Philip Quinn), Hannay does not read *Fear and Trembling* or the *Works of Love* as endorsing divine command ethics—at least in the Ockhamist or voluntarist sense—the adds that for Kierkegaard the absoluteness of ethics "involves the idea, totally alien to [Judge] William's standpoint, of the individual's inability merely as a human being to satisfy the requirements of human fulfillment" (p. 64). I agree that Judge William is intentionally portrayed as lacking the category of sin introduced in the *Fragmentations*, *Stages*, and the *Pastorals*. But although in this respect the Judge's conception of life in the ethical stage is humanistic and incomplete in Kierkegaard's view, I

disagree with Bruce Kirmmse's suggestion (in the present volume) that Judge William's portrayal of ethical requirements and ideals itself is erroneous in Kierkegaard's view and represents for him merely a transitional illusion prior to the religious understanding of ethics. On the contrary, it seems to me that *most* of what Judge William says about the universality and eternity of ethical ideals and about love as a primary form of expressing ethical universality in concrete relations actually anticipates and is further developed in the *Works of Love*. But I think I'm in the minority in this view.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 158-59.

33. Levinas takes this idea mainly from Buber's notion that the I-Thou relation does not supervene on I-It relations. For Buber this theme comes both from Franz Rosenzweig (himself influenced by Kierkegaard) and from a radical reading of Kant's notion of the priority of practical reason. Kierkegaard may also have been inspired in this respect by Kant's notion of moral necessity as an irreducible 'fact' transcending the grasp of theoretical reason.

34. Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, p. 159.

35. See Merold Westphal's discussion of the "adverbial formalism" of Kierkegaard's "ordinary ethics" of authenticity in his paper, "Climacus: A Kind of Postmodernist," *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Robert I. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997): 53-71, esp. 61-63.

36. I will touch on some of these contributions in the last section of the essay as well.

37. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1107a. I am using the translation by W. D. Ross in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, vol. I, Bollingen Series LXXI no. 2, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton University Press/Bollingen Foundation, 1984), p. 1748.

38. See Daniel Dennett, "Mechanism and Responsibility," in *Free Will*, ed. Gary Watson (Oxford University Press, 1982): 150-73, pp. 162-63.

39. See Jonathan Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 165.

40. *Ibid.* p. 171.

41. See Robert C. Roberts, "Character Ethics and Moral Wisdom," *Faith and Philosophy* 15, no. 4 (October 1998): 478-99.

42. This type of virtue ethics thus has its beginning and medieval precedents in the tradition beginning with Duns Scotus. See Bonnie Kent, *Virtues of the Will* (Catholic University of America Press, 1995). MacIntyre says little about Scotus in *After Virtue*, but in chapter VII of *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), he does criticize Scotus on a number of points, even making him the beginning of the new "distinctive 'ought' of moral obligation" (p. 155). But though he raises some good questions about Scotus's epistemology, I think MacIntyre goes fundamentally wrong in his assessment of Scotus. As I understand him, in assigning "primacy" to the will, Scotus is neither implying that intellect is "inert" in relation to will nor that the will can be good only by obedience to revealed divine command, as MacIntyre claims (pp. 154-55). He is rather opening up the possibility that a virtuous will may not be best construed as a will towards the agent's *eudaimonia*—as seems particularly evident in

the virtue of *agape*. With this goes the notion that what makes a will vicious is not simply its misapprehension of or deviation from its own true good. We cannot assume that if *eudaimonia* as a natural *telos* is not the sole criterion, then only revealed divine command can take its place. There are alternatives, and for Scotus the natural duty of love for others illustrates this.

43. Compare this to Bernard Williams's famous "one thought too many" objection in "Persons, character, and morality," *Moral Luck*, p. 18.

44. See Harry Frankfurt, "Identification and Wholeheartedness," in *Responsibility, Character, and the Emotions: New Essays in Moral Psychology*, ed. Ferdinand David Schoeman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); reprinted in Frankfurt, *The importance of what we care about* (Cambridge University Press, 1988): 159-76, p. 174.

45. See Frankfurt, "The importance of what we care about," *Synthese* 53, no. 2 (1982); reprinted in *The importance of what we care about*: 80-94, p. 83.

46. See the discussion of a narrative whole of intelligible actions in *After Virtue*, ch. 15, pp. 204-17.

47. Despite the vagueness of the phrase "an acquired human quality" in MacIntyre's first provisional formulation of a definition of virtues in relation to practices at *After Virtue*, p. 191.

48. In the account presented in Frankfurt's paper, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy* 68, no. 1 (January, 1971); reprinted in *The importance of what we care about*: 11-25.

49. See Alastair Hannay, "Kierkegaard and the Variety of Despair," *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*: 329-348, p. 336.

50. This is an interpretation in my own words of what Frankfurt says about caring in "The importance of what we care about," reprinted in *The importance of what we care about*, pp. 83-85.

51. *Ibid.* pp. 82-83.

52. *Ibid.* p. 84.

53. Compare this to Robert Nozick's notion (only vaguely described) of "reflexive self-subsisting acts" in *Philosophical Explanations* (Harvard University Press, 1981): pp. 299-307.

54. See Mooney, *Selves in Discord and Resolve: Kierkegaard's Moral-Religious Psychology from Either/Or to Sickness Unto Death* (Routledge, 1996), pp. 16-22.

55. See Mooney's description of our self as a reflexive narrative whose meaning develops by refraining itself: *Selves in Discord*, pp. 28-30.

56. The same is even more evidently the case for Charles Taylor's notion of radical self-evaluation (see "What is Human Agency?" in *Human Agency and Action*, pp. 41-43, and "Responsibility for Self" in *Free Will*, ed. Gary Watson [Oxford University Press, 1982], pp. 123-26).

57. See MacIntyre's interesting Foreword to *Wilderness and the Heart: Henry Bugbee's Philosophy of Place, Presence, and Memory*, ed. Edward F. Mooney (Georgia University Press, 1999): xiii-xx, p. xvii. MacIntyre's remarks in this piece are as overtly grounded in the hermeneutic tradition in continental philosophy as anything he has ever written.

58. Whether any existential dispositions can be ethically neutral is a difficult and important question for Kierkegaard, which I abstain from treating here.

59. I would include Husserl's conception of persons in *Ideas II*, but the argument that Scheeler and Husserl are also narrative essentialists must await another forum.
60. Mooney, *Selves in Distress*, p. 19 (citing Iris Murdoch).
61. This is the main thesis in Anthony Rudd's book, *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).
62. See Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*, tr. Howard and Edna Hong (Harper and Row, 1962), reprinted in revised form by Princeton University Press, 1997. Since I cite the Harper Torchbook edition, rather than the newer Princeton edition, my references to this work are given by footnote rather than standard sigla abbreviations.
63. Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, p. 153.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 164 (italics omitted).
65. *Ibid.*, p. 255.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 248.
67. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, 1997 Paul Carus Lectures (Open Court, 1999). All further references to this text will be given parenthetically using the abbreviation DRA.
68. MacIntyre, "Virtue Ethics," *The Encyclopedia of Ethics* (Garland Publishing, 1992), p. 1278 col.1.
69. *Ibid.*
70. See Kierkegaard, "To Preserve One's Soul in Patience," *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*: 181–203. Note here that a patient will's confidence is not human nature but rather a belief that the cause of right is ultimately inexorable. It is this faith which enables one to be "lowly in peace and unity with God and with human beings" in one's heart, whatever disappointments life brings (EUD 192). Kierkegaard thinks that losing patience in this sense means losing one's soul, because it leads to despair and malice.
71. On the relation of freedom and grace in Kierkegaard, see Timothy P. Jackson, "Armenian edification: Kierkegaard on grace and free will," *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*: 235–256.
72. This balanced view, which is presented in the *Concept of Anxiety*, the *Pastors' Diary*, and later works, obviously also owes much to Kant's notion (presented in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*) of radical evil as a basic disposition of the will. See Philip Quinn's useful treatment of this connection between Kant and Kierkegaard in his essay, "Original Sin, Radical Evil, and Moral Identity," *Faith and Philosophy* 1, no. 2 (April 1994): 188–202.
73. Robert C. Roberts, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and a Method of 'Virtue Ethics'," in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, ed. Martin J. Matzuk and Marcel Westphal (Indiana University Press, 1995): 142–66, p. 151.
74. Also see my paper "Petry, MacIntyre, and Kierkegaardian Choice: A Reply to Professor Ballard," *Faith and Philosophy* 15, no. 3 (July 1998): 487–501, in which I argue (i) that my earlier analysis agrees with Marilyn Petry's in "Kierkegaard on Rationality" (reprinted in this volume) and (ii) defend our joint approach against Bruce Ballard's criticisms, which defend MacIntyre's original critique of Kierkegaard.

75. MacIntyre first defines a practice as "any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended" (AV 187). He later adds that "Practices never have a goal or goals fixed for all time—painting has no such goal, nor has physics—but the goals themselves are transmuted by the history of the practice" (AV 194).
76. At least, they do their best to avoid such 'encumbrments.' Whether it is psychologically feasible to live without participating (however imperfectly) in *some* practices—even if it is only a collector's hobby, or an enthusiasm for some sport, or just a connoisseurship of some pleasure, usual or unusual—is an interesting question, but one that need not detain us here.
77. And Philip Quinn's objections to the demand for narrative unity only seem to me to make this problem more pressing. See Quinn's new essay in this volume.
78. Kierkegaard's Judge will help us see why these two failings are existentially connected. Without commitments to goals outside ourselves, we cannot see ourselves as having a unified volitional identity over time, and hence we cannot become existentially "revealed to ourselves."
79. See my argument in "The Meaning of Kierkegaard's Choice between the Aesthetic and the Ethical" (reprinted in the present volume, chapter 4) that aestheticism can be understood as a tacit highest-order commitment not to form concrete or substantive higher-volitions. This can be rephrased in Williams and MacIntyre's terms: aestheticism is an attitude that avoids the question of articulating ground projects and engaging in practices. However, note that 'A' in *Either/Or* is a special case of more advanced aestheticism: he makes an intentional studied art of avoiding commitment, practices, and the social roles these involve. But even if there were a cult of romantics perversely devoted to noninvolvement in this sense, they would hardly count as practitioners cooperating in the same practice (as *would* an order of Zen Buddhist monks, by contrast).
80. I am indebted to MacIntyre for making this point at the Kierkegaard Society session during the American Philosophical Association conference in Boston (December 1999), where an earlier draft of section IV of this paper was discussed.
81. Yet the Judge *does* argue, in a certain sense, with A. His effort fits into the genre which Martha Nussbaum has called "therapeutic argument," see *The Therapy of Desire* (Princeton University Press, 1994), ch. 1. So Kierkegaard is committed to the view common to the Hellenistic philosophical schools that certain kinds of argument *can* have a curative effect on ills of the soul, or that practical reason is not utterly ineffective at persuading agents to come to terms with vices and overcome them. Much of what is valuable in psychoanalysis would seem to proceed on the same premise. In this respect, the virtue-existentialist may have somewhat more faith than the neo-Aristotelian typically has in the possible efficacy of rational persuasion as a means for bringing about motivational changes in persons—or at least in competent, mature adults.

82. And Kierkegaard clearly struggled to define the meaning of his own life (or to determine the unique role God intended for him). See JP I A 75 53 (August 1, 1835), reprinted in the Supplement to *Either/Or* II (EO II 361).

83. And in his comments on Frankfort's essay, "The importance of what we care about," MacIntyre acknowledges the fundamental importance of this volitional phenomenon.

84. See Williams, "Persons, Character, and Morality," in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge University Press, 1981): 1-19, pp. 12-13.

85. Frankfort's work has helped to show that there are at least two subtypes to this process, which Kierkegaard notably tends to run together: (1) Formulating *care*, or at least discovering what one already considers important and making it the focus of active caring, is still compatible with conflicts among cares (and the same holds for Williams's ground projects). (2) But we are capable (and Frankfort thinks we must) of willing that our cares be "wholehearted," which requires that they be mutually consistent and reinforcing, and thus undiminished by ambiguity arising from conflicting commitments. Kierkegaardian authenticity or purity of heart involves both these achievements.

86. How this default volitional orientation differs from the classical orientation towards eudaimonia, how it provides a basis for further development of cares and commitments as experiences accrue, and in what ways these further developments involve libertarian freedom, are the most difficult questions for formulating a Kierkegaardian virtue ethics. I postpone them here, in order to return to them in the last sections of the essay.

87. This "right way" is differently explained in different accounts of authenticity. In addition to explaining the general *concept* of this proto-virtue and its role in the development of selfhood, Kierkegaard's Judge also gives pieces of a particular *conception* or interpretation of what the right way to develop cares and commitments is. This particular account reflects some of the biases of his limited perspective as a pseudonym, and is revised by the accounts in the later pseudonymous works. It is important to make this distinction, since doubts about eccentricities in the Judge's portrait of life-goal articulation need not imply doubts about the importance for virtue ethics in general of having some viable account of authenticity. The same point holds for Williams, Frankfort, and Taylor: they too give a few hints as to how cares and ground projects should or could be developed and interpreted by human agents, but the persuasiveness of their suggestions is largely independent of the force of their more general point that meaningful human life *requires* such commitments.

88. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 219.

89. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Second Ed, trans. Terence Irwin (Hackett Publishing, 1999): Notes to Book I, chapter 7, section 3 (p. 181).

90. Lear, *Artistic: The Desire to Understand* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 160.

91. It is interesting to consider whether this thesis of a unified embracing *telos* acting as the underlying motive for all action (in the constitutive sense just explained) could be maintained *without* believing that the *telos* playing this chief role is "eudaimonia." This will depend on whether we think that happiness in the relevant holistic sense is just functionally *defined* as 'whatever plays this role of

embracing or chief good,' so that to believe eudaimonia is our highest good just is to believe that there is *some* unified embracing *telos* underlying all motivation, and no more. If instead we think that eudaimonia has a more specific psychological sense, so that the thesis 'eudaimonia is the chief good' is synthetic rather than analytic, it *will* be at least logically possible for the chief good of human life not to be eudaimonia.

But however we interpret its thesis that 'the highest good embracing all human motivation is eudaimonia,' eudaimonism involves the related claim that our motivational attitude towards the highest good can properly be understood as a *desire* (i.e., as having the appetitive form of an attraction towards something that satisfies some want or lack in us), and hence that our motivation to pursue more specific ends regarded as intrinsically good must also be types of desire in this psychological sense, since they are expressions or extensions of the one ultimate desire. Calling the highest good "eudaimonia" or happiness, and thus referring us to the flourishing of individuals (and the communities of which they are members) as that which is to be desired when it is lacking, implies that all human motivation is desiderative, driven by a sense of lack or imperfection towards completeness. This is a substantive psychological claim beyond the merely formal claim that motives must by definition be aimed at (or have as their intentional objects) some content qualified as "good" or "valuable" in *some* sense or other.

This desiderative thesis has implications which can be used to challenge eudaimonism. Thus if it were found that our motivation towards some of the ends we pursue for their own sake did *not* have the psychological form of appetitive motivation, this would undermine the eudaimonist thesis that these motives must be expressions of the deepest *desire* for the underlying highest good. Such an argument is developed in chapter 2 of my Ph.D. dissertation, *Self and Will* (University of Notre Dame, 1998). And although Kierkegaard often uses the language of "desire" for infinite personal happiness, I believe that his understanding of will also rejects the eudaimonistic assumption that all human motivation has the desiderative structure of lack-seeking-equilibrium. If so, this will be another point of difference between eudaimonistic and existential virtue ethics.

92. See Bernard Williams, *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (Harper and Row, 1972), ch. 7: "Moral Standards and the Distinguishing Mark of Man."

93. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

94. Frankfort, "The Faintest Passion," Presidential Address of the Eastern Division of the APA, *Proceedings and Addresses of the APA*, vol. 66 (1992): 5-16, p. 14. This essay is reprinted in Frankfort's new collection, *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (Cambridge University Press, 1999): 95-107.

95. I have explored this thesis at length in "Kierkegaard, Anxiety, and the Will," forthcoming in the next *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelen and Hermann Deuser (Walter de Gruyter, 2001).

96. This is a difficult but crucial point. The practical coherence at which we aim in existential self-integration is analogous in *form* to the harmony of ends involved in the ideal of holistic eudaimonia, but existential coherence is at least partly a *made product* of will, unlike the coherence Aristotle thought was waiting to be *found* in (using Heidegger's term) the 'jointure' of all human goods. Existential coherence is achieved only through adjustments and changes in goals

governed by an ideal of volitional unity, sacrificing in the process Aristotle's ideal of the embracing jointure of all human goods. This sacrifice would not have to be made if different human goods were not incompatible in ways which show that there is no sort of eudaimonia that is all-embracing or stands in the jointure of human goods, as Aristotle's chief good was supposed to. Since these conflicts show that the eudaimonistic or holistic notion of a chief good is illusory, the motive for overcoming such conflict must therefore derive from some other ideal. The existentialist ideal of practical coherence as a volitional unity of meaningful projects supplies the answer here.

97. As I noted in section II, Kierkegaard does of course also emphasize (in the *Pastor's* and other works) our desire for an "infinite happiness." This plays a role especially in bringing us to the religious stage, but I do not think Kierkegaard understands the infinite happiness that can be gained only through salvation as our *telos* in the way Aquinas did. He seems to think of it in a fashion analogous to Kant's notion of the Highest Good. Desire for this ultimate happiness plays a role in our dissatisfaction with ethical authenticity alone, but it can only play this role when (a) sin-consciousness brings us to recognize our ethical deficiency and (b) faith introduces the absurd possibility of a miraculous reprieve. That more is involved in this process than the unfolding of an immanent teleology is one of Kierkegaard's basic objections to Hegel's philosophy of spirit.

98. In his response (in this volume) Philip Quinn seems to be arguing that this second-order unification project is not essential to leading a life that is subjectively meaningful for the agent. I think he is right that appreciation of a diversity of values may be one significant component of the overall meaningfulness of a life (and Leonardo de Vinci certainly comes to mind as an exemplar). But given the facticity of human life, the diversity of the practices and pursuits in which we are authentically engaged is usually inversely proportional to the depth of our involvement in them. For some people, the meaningfulness of life may gain more from involvement in some committed relationship or pursuit that can engage otherwise unrecalled talents and interests at once, or even come to pervade virtually every aspect of their lives. But the kind of unity that is *required* in my view (and I think MacIntyre's) for a meaningful life need not involve this singledominated devotion to one theme that structures virtually every aspect of my subjective universe of "meanings" (or my "being-in-the-world"): it can instead be the unity of a narrative with a wide range of diverse themes and subplots involving values that are incommensurable or not ranked on any single objective scale. The hard problem is to interpret correctly the difference between *right and wrong* kinds of diversity in a life of multiple devotions, vocations, or cares. In Kierkegaard's view, there can even be conflicts between the subplots of our life, due to contingencies of external circumstance. In Kierkegaard's sense, then, my life-narrative can even be *tragic* and yet exhibit existential unity (I discuss this further in "The Ethical and Religious Significance of Taciturnus's Letter in *Stages on Life's Way*" in the *IC* volume on *Stages*). But if the cares or ground projects that delineate the subplots of my life are in *essential conflict*, in the sense that some directly embrace principles and goals that others directly exclude or remove from my entire scale of value-rankings, then my commitment to these ground projects is halfhearted or ambiguous in Frankfurt's sense, or doubled-minded in Kierkegaard's sense, and hence necessarily

less meaningful to me. Such a conflict is not tragic, since I would be in the same boat if all external circumstances were as fortuitously arranged as possible. Rather it is an ambivalence of the will, a weakness of spirit, and a loss of self. I have to ask in such a circumstance which of my commitments really does matter to me, or which ought to matter. (It is not a question of which matters *more*: the question arises in that form when the problem is only that I cannot realize both due to external circumstances.) Hence, while contrary to Frankfurt I think that such *aprasia* of the highest-order will is volitionally possible for human persons, I hold that such a person fails to lead a life that is fully meaningful for her. This is also Kierkegaard's view: aestheticism is a kind of *aprasia* or wantonness of the highest-order will (as I argued in "The Meaning of Kierkegaard's Choice Between the Aesthetic and the Ethical," reprinted in the present volume). The position taken in existential virtue ethics thus falls somewhere in between Quinn's and Frankfurt's.

99. To clarify my use of this term, the proto-virtues are formal virtues of character whose presence adds to the person's moral worth. They exclude certain possible forms of volitional character (namely those that manifest the vices of aesthetic inauthenticity). But they have priority in the order of virtues because attaining these qualities in their basic form is the constitutive condition for having any of the higher virtues or vices of volitional character. This is not to say that the proto-virtues must be developed first in the temporal sense, after which higher virtues of vices may develop 'on top of' these formative conditions. On the contrary, the proto-virtues are formal in the sense that they may never exist in a person by themselves, without the higher virtues or vices. This is equivalent to the claim that a person whose volitional character meets the constitutive condition for being evaluated in terms of the strong contrasts between the higher virtues and vices is never in a *neutral* position on that scale. Thus the priority of the proto-virtues consists in their being necessarily involved in any of the higher virtues or vices of volitional character, not in their being a separable and temporally prior state of the will.

100. Williams, "Persons, Character, and Morality," *Moral Luck*, p. 18.

101. See Frankfurt, "The importance of what we care about," in *The importance of what we care about*, pp. 81-82.

102. See Frankfurt, "Identification and wholeheartedness," in *The importance of what we care about*, 159-176.

103. See Frankfurt, "Autonomy, Necessity, and Love," in *Vernunftsgeschichte in der Moderne: Stuttgarter Hegel-Kongress 1993*, ed. Hans-Friedrich Fulda and Rolf-Peter Horstmann (Klett-Cotta Sonderdruck, 1994): 433-447; reprinted in *Autonomy, Necessity, and Love* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

104. This again is what Merold Westphal means by the "adverbial formalism" of the requirements of authenticity in his paper, "Climacus: A Kind of Postmodernist" (op. cit.). I hope to have shown, however, that this "adverbial" proto-ethics is not entirely without content, since the proto-virtues involved in authenticity are the conditions for a person's inner character having moral worth of any substantive sort.

105. Otherwise put, there is no full 'unity' of the proto-virtues and the substantive virtues: the latter require the former, but not the former the latter.

106. A problem similar to this is considered by Alastair Hannay in his discussion of *The Purvis of Heart* (see Kierkegaard, pp. 231-33).

107. See Peter Mehl, "Moral Virtue, Mental Health, and Happiness: The Moral Psychology of Kierkegaard's Judge William," in the *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Either/Or Part II*, ed. Robert Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995): 155-82, p. 165.
108. Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, p. 235.
109. See Daniel Breazale, "Check or Checkmate: On the Finitude of the Finite Self" in *The Modern Subject*, ed. Ameriks and Saarna (SUNY Press, 1995): 87-114.
110. There are numerous arguments in the German Idealist tradition that the human self must have some unmediated access to the Real in order for the self-relations that constitute its individuality (including even unitary self-awareness over time) to be possible. Kant gave such an argument in his "Refutation of Idealism," and Husserl and Heidegger followed him in arguing that our access to Being cannot only be through the mediation of appearances, images, signs, or mental representations. For these writers, there are points of direct contact with the Real without which self-consciousness itself would be impossible (e.g., perhaps in the awareness of real motion as an index of time-passage, or in internal time-consciousness). In a parallel sense, for Kierkegaard, moral imperatives provide the *Aestoff* that first makes possible the sort of reflexive volitional relation to our own first-order psychic states that constitutes *practical* selfhood. Ultimately, however, the reflexive relations of selfhood find their final basis only in a divine *Aestoff* for Kierkegaard. Thus *Sickness Unto Death* begins with the claim that full or developed selfhood is a reflexive relation resting on a divine third term.
111. Thus as Hannay says, the aesthete has a "growing sense of the inability of temporal categories to provide criteria of personal identity and humanly fulfilling achievement. This is the birth of anxiety. . . ." (*Kierkegaard*, p. 164).
112. Mehl, "Moral Virtue, Mental Health, and Happiness," pp. 167-68.
113. Hannay, "Kierkegaard and the Variety of Despair," *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, p. 337.
114. I pursue this point more fully in "The Ethical and Religious Significance of Taciturnus's Letter in Kierkegaard's *Stages on Life's Way*" (op. cit.).
115. Robert C. Roberts, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and a Method of 'Virtue Ethics,'" p. 149.
116. Kierkegaard's formula for full selfhood combines the individuality achieved through an ethically qualified intrapersonal relation to oneself, or care for one's own character, and dependence on and relation to the external through recognizing one's creaturely finitude and temporal facticity. The pseudonym Anti-Climacus expresses this in quasi-Hegelian terms as a relation or synthesis of the temporal and eternal that recognizes itself as created by God and rests in faith on this divine *Aestoff*; see *Sickness Unto Death*, p. 13.
117. The "merely" is important here, because the ethical mode also includes or involves aesthetic sensitivity, but now as nested within and transformed by a deeper horizon of moral sensibility.
118. This Kierkegaardian idea that (a) the basic life-views defining the existential stages operate as frames of reference or salience, and yet (b) these frames are not incommensurable but connected (each opening at the limiting horizon of its immediate interior) is similar in spirit and point to Hans-Georg Gadamer's

conception of the unity of horizons of intelligibility. Since MacIntyre's own notion of rationality within competing traditions owes so much to Gadamer's hermeneutics, we naturally find here another set of overlaps with Kierkegaard (as Anthony Rudd's essay in the present volume emphasizes).

119. I would cite Schindler (at least as portrayed in *Schindler's List*) as a prime example of this development. For what the hero in *Schindler's List* undergoes seems to be precisely a Kierkegaardian movement from an aesthetic to an ethical existence, culminating in a recognition of unanswerable or categorical guilt before the infinite ethical demand to save "one more" than he has. On this topic, see my paper, "Schindler's List: A Personal Kierkegaardian Reflection on the Nature of the Ethical," in *Religious Humanism* (forthcoming 2001). My view contrasts with Lillegard's discussion of Schindler near the end of his essay in this volume. But Lillegard is of course referring to the actual Oskar Schindler, rather than to Steven Spielberg's quasi-fictional character.